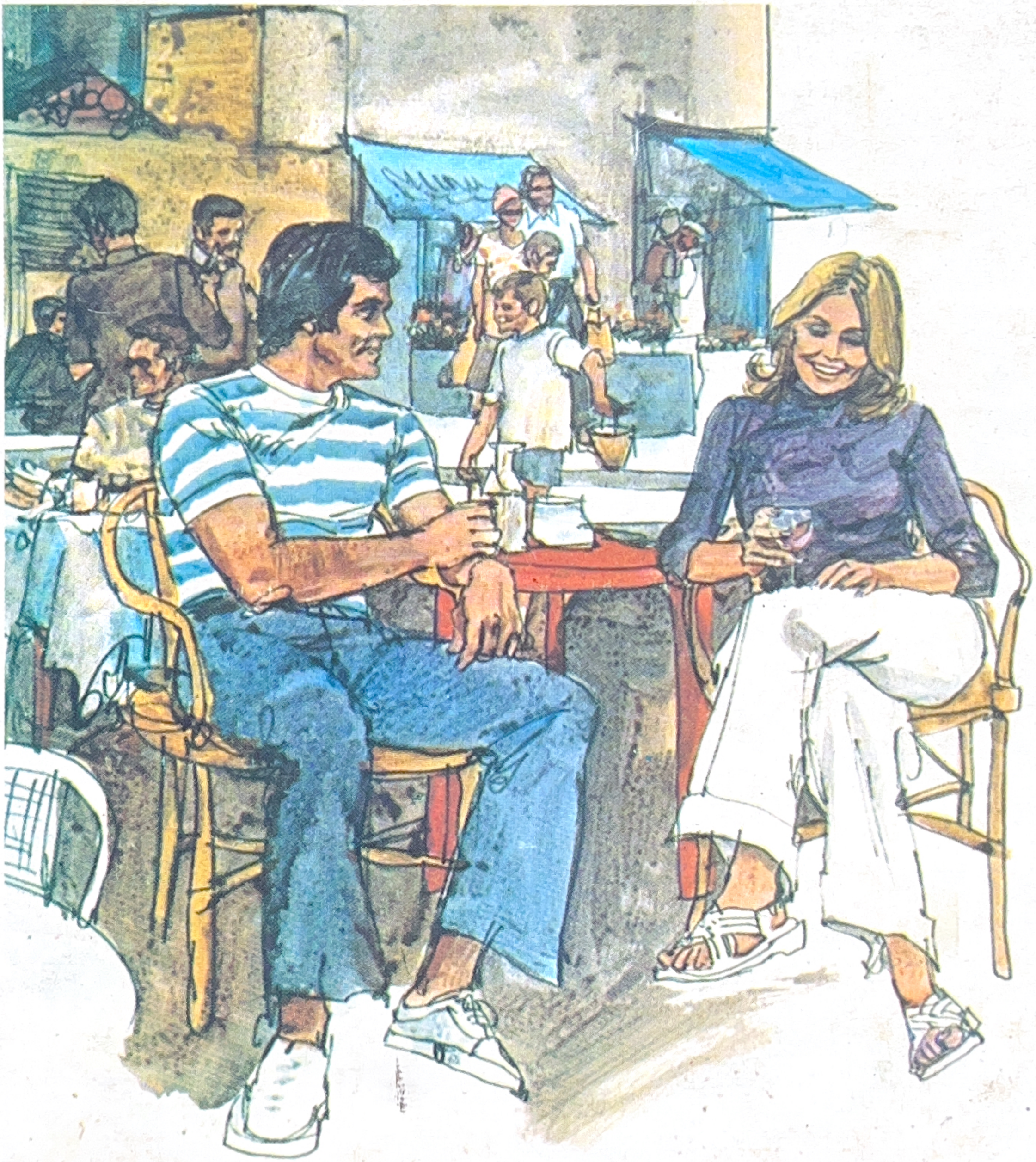
THE SUN IN SPLENDOUR

MILLS & BOON

Anne Weale



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Ros's talents as a cook had got her several interesting jobs, but none more fascinating than the one Richard Livingstone was offering her—as cook aboard his luxury yacht sailing around the Spanish coast. It would also help to solve her more personal problem, that of educating her young orphaned nephew, Christopher. But her enigmatical new employer seemed likely to pose problems of a different kind. He was rich, charming and good-looking—but was it any use Ros being attracted to him? Was he any more likely to be seriously interested in her than the more lightweight but equally charming Jaime Hatfield? Shouldn't she just concentrate on her job?

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Ros took the job which the enigmatical Richard Livingstone offered her because it seemed the solution to her problems. But was she to find that her new employer would provide problems of a different kind? Time would tell.

THE SUN IN SPLENDOUR

BY

ANNE WEALE

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17–19 FOLEY STREET
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All characters in this book have no existence outside the imagination of the Author, and have no relation whatsoever to anyone bearing the same name or names. They are not even distantly inspired by any individual known or unknown to the Author, and all the incidents are pure invention.

First published 1975

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ISBN 0 263 05946 3

Made and Printed in Great Britain by
C. Nicholls & Company Ltd
The Philips Park Press, Manchester

CHAPTER ONE

Ros was frowning over her airmail letter from England when the buzzer summoned her to her employer's bedroom.

Ten minutes earlier she had taken in Margot's breakfast tray: on it a glass of unsweetened orange juice, a pot of black coffee, a crispbread, a spoonful of diet marmalade and an assortment of vitamin pills. When she had lunch at home, on her own, Margot would have only a cup of consommé and a green salad, or a small piece of fish, or perhaps a little grilled liver. But in the evening she would eat her way through one of Ros's delicious four-course dinners with unrestrained relish; and this not once or twice a week, but three or four times. For when Margot MacLaren was not playing hostess to her own coterie of literary and theatrical people, she was entertaining for Waldo Baxter, the American tycoon who was her third husband.

Ros had been cooking for them since their arrival in London fifteen months ago. When they had moved to Paris, she had moved with them. A few weeks hence they were returning to the States, and although there had been a time when she would have been happy to accept Margot's invitation to cross the Atlantic, that adventure was no longer possible.

At twenty-three unattached, independent, and with no intention of settling down for a long time yet, suddenly Ros had found herself encumbered with a thirteen-year-old schoolboy; a boy who was in his second term at an expensive public school; a boy who somehow, in the absence

of any provision for him by his dead parents, had to be kept at that school until he was eighteen or more.

It was with this new and heavy responsibility on her mind that Ros left the lavishly appointed kitchen and tapped on the door of the Baxters' luxurious bedroom. Waldo's bed had not been slept in. He was in Switzerland. In the other bed, pillows piled high behind her, Margot was sipping coffee and reading her mail.

"There'll be two more people to dinner tonight, Ros. What are you giving us? Will it stretch?"

Ros handed her the menu which she had worked out the day before. "Who are your two extra people?" she enquired, because Margot relied on her never to serve dishes which guests had eaten on a previous visit to the apartment.

"No one we've had before. Ellen Booth, who is the daughter of a woman I know in New York, and an Englishman called Richard Livingstone. You've heard of him, I expect."

"No, I don't think so," said Ros. "What is he? What does he do?"

"He's in real estate. Ellen says he's one of the wealthiest men in England. He's also young, and *very* good-looking. I think Ellen is hoping to become the second Mrs. Richard Livingstone."

"What happened to his first wife?" asked Ros, not because she was interested but because she could tell that Margot was.

"They're separated, I guess. I don't know yet. We met in the bar during the interval, and by the time Ellen had introduced him, and I'd asked them to dinner tonight, the bell was ringing for the second half of the show. Ellen just breathed in my ear that he was rich as well as attractive."

Margot pushed away the custom-made table on wheels which at present supported her breakfast tray but was really designed to bear the scarlet typewriter on which she tapped out a fortnightly column which was syndicated throughout the United States.

She was in her middle fifties, but looked ten years younger because she had kept a slim figure and wore casual, no-age-tag clothes with polo collars which concealed her neck, and long sleeves which hid her elbows. In its natural state her hair was probably grey, but she spent a lot of money maintaining the beige-with-blonde-streaks which had once cost her nothing. But she was too busy with her career to spend hours having massage and facials, and she disapproved of women who wasted their time in that manner.

"Either they're rotten with vanity, or they're terrified that at the first sign of a wrinkle the men in their lives will look round for someone younger and fresher," she had once remarked to Ros. "That's a pitiful attitude. If a woman has an outgoing personality, and she takes the trouble to make a man comfortable, she doesn't have to worry about her laughter lines. Not that you'll have any problems, honey. You know the old saying – Kissing don't last: cookery do! Anyone who can cook the way you can is never going to have husband trouble."

"Except perhaps trouble in finding one in the first place," Ros had said jokingly. "Husbands may think cooking is more important, but boy-friends tend to put kissing first."

"I daresay you've had your chances, and I think you're sensible not to have jumped into marriage the way I did when I was a kid of nineteen. If I had my time over, I wouldn't consider marrying before twenty-five, maybe thirty," Margot had replied firmly.

Apart from writing his name on a card to stand in one of Margot's set of antique porcelain place card holders, Ros gave no further thought to Richard Livingstone or the American girl. The Baxters' dining-table could seat twenty people and, when there were six guests or more, Ros had Adele, the daily maid, to help her serve the meal. But with only four guests and the Baxters she could cope single-handed.

That evening, when everything was in readiness, she had a brisk shower in the bathroom adjoining her comfortable blue and white bed-sitting-room. Then she brushed her long, light brown hair and wound it into a bun which she topped with a bow of navy silk ribbon attached to a comb.

She had devised a kind of uniform for herself. It consisted of an ankle-length navy blue skirt, a red and white print blouse with modified leg-o'-mutton sleeves, and a long snowy white muslin apron with ruffles over the shoulders. The apron was a genuine piece of Victoriana which she had found in *Antiquarius*, the King's Road antique market, during her training days in London. It was an outfit which suited her, and which gratified her employers by making it clear to their guests – before they had tasted the food – that she was no ordinary cook.

Waldo Baxter had flown in from Zürich during the afternoon. As it was his custom to open the door to his guests, and to dispense the drinks before dinner, Ros's first sight of the visitors was when she carried in the splendid silver tureen which was Margot's latest acquisition.

As prim as an Edwardian parlourmaid, she stood behind Margot's chair while her employer ladled shrimp bisque into the white and gold Worcester bowls she had bought during her sojourn in England.

"Good evening, Miss Slade. How are you?" asked Art

Leventhal, the Paris correspondent to a leading American newspaper, and one of Margot's closest cronies.

"I'm very well, thank you, Mr. Leventhal." Ros smiled at him and at his wife, both of whom she had met many times.

"Our charming *cordon bleu* cook is a compatriot of yours, Richard," said Waldo, addressing the dark man on Margot's right.

"Really?" For the first time Richard Livingstone's cold grey glance turned on the tall, slender girl standing by the hostess's chair. Their eyes met, but only briefly. By then the first bowl was ready to be taken to Mrs. Leventhal.

When Ros withdrew from the dining-room, her impression of Richard was of a handsome, arrogant man in his middle thirties. As for Ellen, she seemed a perfect match for him; an ash-blonde with a spectacular figure and beautiful aquamarine eyes.

It was Ros's custom, when dinner was over and everyone was in the drawing-room with Margot pouring freshly-ground coffee from an electric percolator, to load the dish-washer and sit down to her own meal.

She was drinking the re-heated soup when there was a tap at the door and, to her astonishment, Richard Livingstone walked into the kitchen.

"May I talk to you for a few minutes, Miss Slade?"

"Why, yes . . . of course. What about?"

He drew a chair out from the table, and sat down and folded his arms. "Is it possible to turn off that contraption for a moment?" – with a frowning nod at the dish-washer.

When she had silenced the machine, he continued, "I understand from Mrs. Baxter that you're looking for another post. You don't wish to go to America with them."

"No . . . no, I don't."

"How would you feel about working in Spain? No, let me enlarge on that before you answer. I make my living by property development, and at present my principal project is a very special marina on the east coast of Spain. I need a first-rate cook for the yacht which will be my headquarters until my house there is ready. Not only must the crew be fed well, but I need to entertain prospective investors, and there are no convenient restaurants of a standard to appeal to the sort of people who can afford to spend thirty or forty thousand pounds on a summer house. From my own experience of your cooking, and from what Mrs. Baxter says about your qualifications and previous experience, I think you could fill the bill admirably."

"Well, thank you . . . I'm very flattered," said Ros, greatly taken aback. "It sounds a most interesting job, and a few months ago I would have jumped at it. But now there are personal reasons why I must return to England as soon as possible. So thank you very much, Mr. Livingstone, but I'm afraid I can't accept your offer."

"By 'personal reasons' do you mean there is a man waiting for you?" he enquired bluntly.

She saw no point in explaining her situation to him. He did not strike her as a man who would be interested in other people's problems. "Yes, there's . . . someone who needs me."

"I see." He gave her a long, thoughtful look as he rose to his feet. "In that case I won't pursue the matter. Good night, Miss Slade. My compliments on a superb meal."

"Thank you. Good night."

She watched the door close behind him, and wondered suddenly if she had been a fool to reject his proposal without even thinking it over.

It was after midnight when the party broke up. Ros, who was reading in bed, heard Art Leventhal's deep rumbling laugh in the hall as the guests took their leave. A few minutes later there was a knock on her door, and Margot looked in.

"You excelled yourself tonight, Ros. Oh, that Poulet Marengo – too delicious! I don't know how we're going to get along without you, but if you've turned down Richard Livingstone, I guess it's no use my trying to persuade you to reconsider. You didn't mind him invading the kitchen, I hope?"

"Not at all."

"I don't think that man is accustomed to having his offers rejected. He looked a little piqued when he came back after talking to you. He's an attractive creature, but I fancy if Ellen *does* catch him, she won't find him easy to handle."

"She's very glamorous."

"Yes, but not very intelligent, and in my judgment Richard is both too old and too young to be satisfied with a woman who is ornamental merely. He may very well have an affair with her, but I don't see him offering marriage, which is what Ellen has in mind."

After Margot had gone to bed, Ros switched off the light and lay thinking that it was unlikely she would ever have another employer as friendly, forthright and easy to please as her present one. Margot had treated her more like a daughter than an employee, and although the post had – to some girls – the disadvantage that most of her time off had been during the day, this had not been a serious inconvenience to Ros. Since coming to Paris she had met only one young man she liked well enough to go about with, and her daytime freedom had allowed her to explore the city far more thoroughly than if her job had

involved ordinary working hours.

As far as men were concerned, she did not share Margot's view that marriage should be eschewed until twenty-five or even thirty, but on the other hand her elder sister's marriage had been a salutory example of the fact that to marry too young could quickly lead to regret.

Bertrane had been only seventeen when she had persuaded her grandparents to allow her to marry John Oldmeadow. Less than a year later Christopher had been born, and she had begun to fret for the freedom enjoyed by her unmarried girl friends. She had never resigned herself to the restrictions imposed on her by her unplanned and unwelcome son. At the earliest possible age, Christopher had been sent as a boarder to a fashionable preparatory school.

Ros had seen little of her sister during those years. They were separated not only by the eight-year difference in their ages, but by the distance between Norfolk and Middlesex. Bertrane and John had lived in Ruislip. Until she achieved the O levels necessary to her chosen career as a home economist, Ros had remained with her grandparents and her brothers in a village ten miles from Norwich.

She could not remember her parents. They had died in a road accident when she was four. Nineteen years later, a similar accident had orphaned Christopher. But the difference between the two tragedies had been that Ros's father had been a prosperous and prudent man. His estate had been sufficient to support his four children until they could support themselves. Whereas John Oldmeadow had died with a heavy mortgage, extensive hire purchase commitments, an overdraft and a mass of other debts. He and Bertrane had lived beyond their means to an extent which Ros found incredible. When their dis-

ordered finances had been sorted out, there had been no outstanding liabilities, but no assets either.

By this time, Ros's grandfather had died, and her grandmother was in the unfortunate position of so many people of her age. The fixed income which should have continued to provide her with the comforts to which she was accustomed was rapidly falling behind the ever-rising cost of living. Grannie Slade had become a member of the New Poor. She could give Christopher a bed, but she could not provide his board. Even if he were taken away from his public school and sent to a State school, it would still cost a lot to clothe and feed him.

Ros had felt very strongly that to wrench him from his accustomed milieu, and put him in the care of his rather frail and nervous grandmother, would be the last straw for the boy. Her brothers could not help their nephew. Andrew was married, with two infants of his own to support. William, still single, was working his way round the world. She had therefore taken it upon herself to pay Christopher's school fees, and to provide a home for him in the holidays.

Since her skills commanded an excellent salary, and she had always been careful with her money, the fees were not an immediate worry to her. How to provide a home was the pressing problem. It would not be difficult to get a job which would leave her evenings and weekends free but, with a large slice of her salary earmarked for school fees, it was going to be almost impossible to find a decent flat. Anyway, having grown up in the country herself, she did not feel that even a nice flat in London was a suitable background for a teenage boy.

On the other hand, in the provinces the choice of jobs was more limited, salaries were usually lower, and the housing situation was not much easier. Even in darkest

Norfolk it was no longer possible to buy derelict cottages for a song. With no other drains on her salary, she might have qualified for a Corporation mortgage on a Victorian terraced house in the side streets of Norwich. With the school fees, and all the other expenses of keeping Christopher, even that was beyond her.

Whichever way she looked at the problem, she seemed to be stumped. Upon which discouraging reflection, she drifted to sleep.

"You're eating out tonight, Ros," announced Margot, coming into the kitchen a few days later.

"Am I? How come?" asked Ros, pausing in her task of cutting a piece of salt pork into small pieces for a *minestrone.*

"Richard Livingstone has invited us to dine with him at La Grenouille, and he particularly wants you to be there."

"Really? How odd!" Ros exclaimed.

"Why is it odd?" asked Margot, smiling. "You're a very lovely girl. Paris is full of men who'd be glad to have you on the other side of the dinner table."

"I'm sure that isn't *his* reason. I suppose he's just being polite and kind because I'm English."

"I wouldn't think politeness, in that sense, is one of his chief characteristics. Or kindness," remarked Margot dryly. "If you were to ask me his motive, I'd guess that he likes your looks, but that what really sparked his interest was your *lack* of interest in him."

"Even if I had been interested, I wouldn't have made eyes at him while I was busy serving a meal."

"You might not. A lot of girls would. Anyway, it's significant that Ellen is not going to be present tonight." And on this statement, Margot departed.

Ros had a selection of evening clothes, but after some thought she decided to wear the skirt which was part of her "uniform" and a different top, a pin-tucked white cotton shirt from Mexicana in Lower Sloane Street.

La Grenouille was a small, quiet, expensive restaurant patronised by French politicians and diplomats. Richard was already there when Ros and the Baxters arrived. At the beginning of dinner, Margot dominated the conversation. But as the evening passed she became unusually silent, although this was a change which Ros recognised only in retrospect because for much of the meal she herself was making a conscious effort to pay attention, and not to let her mind wander to the letter from England which had come by the afternoon post.

It was when they were having coffee, and the waiter was lighting the men's cigars, that Margot said suddenly, "Richard, I hate to spoil a delightful evening, but I feel a migraine coming on. Would you mind if Waldo took me home now, before it really hits me?"

Richard was full of sympathy. But when Ros rose, taking for granted that she would accompany the Baxters, Margot pressed her to sit down.

"No, no, you stay a while longer, my dear. There's no need to spoil your evening. Richard will bring you home later."

"With pleasure," he agreed.

"Oh, but I'd rather –" Ros began.

No one was listening to her. Margot was fumbling in her bag for the dark glasses which she wore even in winter when the light was strong. Waldo was asking a waiter to fetch his wife's coat, and Richard was telling another waiter that Madame was feeling unwell and a taxi must be summoned at once.

He left Ros alone at the table for a few minutes while

he saw his other guests to the taxi. When he returned, and sat down and took his cigar from the ash tray, he said, "Does Margot have migraines often?"

"No, not often. This is the second one she's had in the time I've been with them. I think they usually occur after she's had a particularly busy spell."

He did not pursue the subject, but sat smoking and looking at her in silence. She found his scrutiny unnerving. She had never been shy, even when she was much younger, and her job had brought her into contact with a number of successful, high-powered men. But they had been older than Richard Livingstone, as he was older than any of the young men with whom she had sat in the intimate ambience of a softly-lit restaurant late at night. She felt curiously out of her depth with him.

At length, he said, "Will you be sorry to leave Paris? Have you enjoyed your time here?"

"Yes, I have, very much. And living here has done wonders for my French," she added, smiling. "It was very halting when I arrived, but now it's not bad."

Presently he suggested that as it was a dry night, they should walk back to the Baxters' apartment.

"I don't get enough exercise," he remarked, when the doorman had saluted them, and they were strolling along the quiet, lamplit street. "I'm always in a car or an aeroplane, or behind a desk. It's a difficult situation to remedy."

Ros said, "I used to cook for the directors of a big firm in London. They were all rather concerned about coronaries and strokes, so I always avoided the high-cholesterol foods, and kept down the calorie level. But, as you say, exercise is as important as sensible eating. One of the directors told me that he kept fit by doing a Royal Canadian Air Force programme of exercises. It took about ten

minutes a day."

"Ah, yes, that's the 5BX programme. I do it, too," replied Richard. "But although it keeps one in shape, it lacks the mental refreshment of a game of golf or even an ordinary walk."

"Do you live in London all the time? Or have you a country home as well?"

"I used to have one. I've given it up."

His voice had a clipped note, and she remembered suddenly that he had been married, but was no longer. Perhaps his wife had died, and he had sold their country home because it held painful memories for him. Or perhaps there had been a divorce, and the country place was part of his former wife's settlement. Whichever it was, Ros sensed that she had touched a sore spot and hastened to retrieve her mistake by talking of the miles she had walked in Paris, and of the things she had seen which a motorist would have missed.

When they reached the entrance to the apartments, she thanked him for including her in the dinner party, and held out her hand to him.

Instead of taking it, he said abruptly, "What is your present salary?"

The question was so unexpected that, without pausing to consider whether he had the right to ask it, she told him.

He said, "If you come to work for me in Spain, I'll double that. But I'm leaving Paris tomorrow, and I want your decision before I go. Sleep on it, Miss Slade. If my offer makes you change your mind, I'll be at this number until noon."

As he spoke, he took a card from his wallet, and quickly wrote on the back of it. He handed it to her. "Good night."

Before she could stammer a reply, he was walking briskly away.

At two o'clock in the morning, Ros got up and went to the kitchen to make herself a cup of chocolate which she hoped would help her to sleep.

Richard Livingstone's amazing offer had thrown her into a whirl of indecision. Only that afternoon she had received a circular letter from the Chairman of the Governors of Christopher's school. It warned parents that the fees must be raised in the autumn, and appealed to them to subscribe as generously as possible to the fund for the indoor swimming pool and a new laboratory block.

It was the second disquieting letter Ros had received within a week. The first had been from the Principal of the catering school where she had trained, and through which she had expected to obtain her next job. When Miss Selkirk had written to tell her that no post of the type she required was immediately available, although they could offer several interesting possibilities in London, Ros had been disappointed but not alarmed. Indeed that very night she had rejected Richard's first offer out of hand.

Although that was only a few days ago, the notice about the school fees, and the nature of Richard's second offer, made her view the situation very differently now.

In the morning, she would have asked Margot's advice, but while she was grinding the beans for her employers' breakfast coffee, Waldo came to the kitchen. He told her his wife's migraine had kept her awake until the small hours. Now she was sleeping, and should not be disturbed until she woke, which probably would not be until lunch time.

So it was without consulting Margot that, at half past eleven, Ros telephoned the number Richard had given her.

When she heard him say crisply, "Livingstone speaking," she announced herself, and added baldly, "I've decided to accept your offer, Mr. Livingstone."

"I thought you would."

"But I'm afraid I can't come to Spain until Mr. and Mrs. Baxter return to the States," she pointed out, irked by his tone.

"That will be perfectly satisfactory. My secretary will be in touch with you about details. *Au revoir*, Miss Slade." He rang off.

As Ros replaced the receiver, she had the uneasy feeling that she had just made the biggest mistake of her life. *I thought you would*. Those four words, and the tone in which he had said them, seemed to sum up an attitude which was going to be hard to tolerate. Clearly, Richard Livingstone thought that money could buy anything and anyone.

If it were not for Christopher, I wouldn't work for the man if he offered to treble my salary, she thought vexedly.

A few days later she received from London a contract with a covering letter from someone who signed herself Susan Stobs, Personal Assistant to Mr. Livingstone. Miss Stobs asked Ros to let her know when she would be free to travel, and whether she wished to fly from Paris or from England. For two days, Ros postponed the irrevocable commitment in the hope that she might yet hear from Miss Selkirk. But no word came and she had to sign the contract which was for one year, subject to a probationary period of a month. She wrote to Miss Stobs that she would travel to Spain direct from Paris, and would Miss Stobs please inform her where Mr. Livingstone's yacht would be at the time of her arrival.

The Baxters were due to leave France in late May, and

on the second Saturday in May Christopher had a week-end *exeat* from school. Ros asked Margot if she could have a few days' leave to coincide with the *exeat*, and in return she promised to stay with the Baxters to the very day of their departure, and to do all Margot's personal packing. The antiques which her employer had acquired in Europe were being handled by a specialist firm of shippers.

The house in which Ros had grown up was no longer her grandmother's home. Mrs. Slade had moved to a bungalow; a cramped, flimsy place compared with the spacious solidity of Southernwood, the handsome early Victorian family house with its lovely views of fields and spinneys. The bungalow had so-called 'picture' windows, but they framed no views, only the unlovely sight of other bungalows. But old Mrs. Slade seemed not to mind her changed circumstances. She had always been rather a negative person compared with her lively, bracing husband, and since his death she had given up the effort to be sociable, and spent most of her time watching television. Her principal topic of conversation was the terrible state of the world. To Ros, remembering her grandfather's love of life and inextinguishable optimism, it seemed a pity that he should have been the one to die first. It made her feel guilty to think it, but she knew that had Grandfather been the one to survive, he and she and Christopher could have lived together very happily. With her grandmother, such an arrangement was an impossibility.

When Ros told her that she was going to work in Spain and hoped to be able to arrange for Christopher to spend the summer holidays with her, Mrs. Slade said, "Yes, that would be much the best thing. I'm very fond of the child, naturally. But my health is not at all good now, and I'm

too old to cope with a boy of that age. He has such a ravenous appetite, and all that cooking and washing is too much for me. I eat very little myself, which is just as well now that food is so dreadfully expensive."

"I'm afraid you will have to have him for half-term, Granny. There's nowhere else for him to go, and it wouldn't be worth the expense to fly him to Spain for one week."

"I can manage for a few days, but to have him for two months in the summer is out of the question, I'm afraid."

The following afternoon Ros arrived at Christopher's school. She had arranged to have a talk with his housemaster before taking her nephew out for the weekend. A few minutes after she had sunk into a deep, cretonne-covered chair by the wood fire in Mr. Campbell's study, Mrs. Campbell came in with a tea tray.

"Hello, Miss Slade. How are you? What miserable weather for May, isn't it? I thought you might not have had much lunch, or perhaps none at all, so I've made tea and toast."

"How kind of you. Thank you." Ros smiled at the capable-looking Scotswoman who seemed to take as much interest in the boys in her husband's House as he did himself.

It was Mrs. Campbell who had broken the news to Christopher that his parents had been killed, and who had kept him under her wing until Ros could be contacted.

The Campbells listened attentively to Ros's explanation of why she had taken the Spanish job instead of pursuing her original intention to set up home in England.

"I think you have made the right decision," said Mr. Campbell, when she had finished. "It's difficult for a

young couple, with their joint resources, to establish a home nowadays. How much greater must be the difficulties confronting any single person. And I daresay, from your own point of view, you don't really want to settle down yet."

"No, I suppose I don't. But I would – for Christopher's sake – if houses and flats were not so prohibitively expensive."

"What I think you should always remember when you're facing decisions about Christopher is that he is not a *permanent* part of your life," said Mr. Campbell. "In ten years' time, he may be a married man with a child of his own. Therefore, although you want to do your best for him, it would be going too far to sacrifice all your own plans and hopes for the future."

"Yes, I agree with that wholeheartedly," put in his wife. "There is such a thing as being too unselfish, Miss Slade. I don't know which is worse: the over-possessive mother whose children are her sole interest in life, or the career-mother with too little time for them."

"I'm sure your regular letters have meant a great deal to Christopher," continued Mr. Campbell. "Unfortunately his parents were rather erratic in that respect, and although schoolboys are seldom prolific correspondents themselves, it's very important that they shouldn't feel they are 'out of sight and out of mind'."

Presently he put his head out of the door and instructed a boy who was passing to go and find Oldmeadow. Within a few minutes there was a tap at the door, and Ros rose expectantly to her feet.

"Hello, Christopher. How are you?" She smiled and held out her hand.

She felt it was a stiff way to greet him, but he had never been accustomed to being hugged, and a hug from

her, in the presence of the Campbells, might embarrass him.

"Hello, Aunt Ros. I'm very well, thank you," replied her nephew, equally formally.

Christopher Oldmeadow did not take after his parents. Had he inherited her delicate blonde colouring or his father's flamboyant good looks, Bertrane might have taken more interest in him. But he was not an attention-catching child. His thick, straight hair was mouse-coloured and flopped untidily over his forehead; he was of average height and build; and his conversation consisted of polite monosyllables.

"He hasn't an ounce of charm," Bertrane had once complained to her sister.

Privately Ros had thought that charm was an unlikely and even dubious quality to find in any half-grown boy. It seemed to her, as a bystander, that not only her sister but many parents expected too much of their offspring. She hoped that when, eventually, she had children herself, she would be content as long as they were healthy and happy. Now, by a quirk of fate, she had a child. Christopher's not-very-good school reports, his tendency to be car-sick and his bitten nails were her problems. Her theories were being put to the test.

The school was not far from the coast, and Ros had booked rooms at a guest-house which had a reputation for plain but well-cooked food and simple comfort.

For an hour before the evening meal, she and Christopher pottered along the beach, and she told him about her new job.

"Will you mind spending your holidays abroad in future?" she asked.

"No, I shall like it. I'm the only one in my form who hasn't been abroad. Mother and Father went to Portugal

twice, but they didn't take me. I'd rather do anything than spend the holidays with Granny. She's a nice old thing, but she fusses too much, and she talks about them and starts crying," he added uncomfortably.

"She hasn't any interests, poor dear, so she lives in the past," said Ros. "Grandpa was quite different; he was always planning what he would do tomorrow, or next week, or next month."

"Yes, I wouldn't have minded staying with him," said Christopher.

Out of season, the guest-house catered mainly to reps during the week. But as it was a weekend the only other visitors were a honeymoon couple who disappeared immediately after supper, and a pair of middle-aged spinsters, one of whom was recuperating from an illness. They passed the evening in conversation with the proprietress, while the proprietor played cards with Ros and her nephew.

Next morning the honeymoon couple went home, the spinsters went to church, and Ros and Christopher walked the beach in the other direction.

"I wish we had cooks like you at school," he said, after asking more questions about her new job. "The food is absolutely foul. We never have roast potatoes, and they only give us chips occasionally. Most of the time it's that poisonous mashed-plastic stuff they advertise on TV."

It was the first time that a conversation between them had required no effort on her part to keep it flowing. Indeed Christopher was so unusually talkative that she began to think that beneath his customary reserve there might be unsuspected vivacity.

After a lunch of roast duck and syrup pudding, she took him back to school as, although his *exeat* did not end until seven in the evening, her flight to Paris left at

eight, and the drive back to London in the car she had hired would take at least three hours.

"That was a brilliant pud, wasn't it?" said Christopher, during the journey.

His wistful tone made her laugh. "Wait till you taste some of my specialities. Brilliant isn't the word!"

Their parting was offhand. He thanked her for taking him out, and she gave him a casual pat on the shoulder. "My pleasure. Cheerio, Christopher."

But as she drove away, she realised that the weekend had not been altogether the fulfilment of a duty. Until this trip, she had felt only compassion and a sense of responsibility. Now it seemed possible that she could become genuinely fond of him.

It was early afternoon when the jet taking the Baxters back to America took off from Orly airport, but Ros's train did not leave the Gare d'Austerlitz until the early evening. She filled the interval by taking her luggage to the station and leaving it there while she went for a stroll in the neighbourhood; and she was not the only Spain-bound traveller who was killing time near the station. While she was having coffee in a café, she fell into conversation with an elderly English couple whose destination was the Spanish island of Menorca where they were going to stay with another retired couple who had gone to live there.

"Wouldn't it have been easier, and not much more expensive, to fly?" she asked, when they had explained the purpose of their journey.

"As a matter of fact, it would have been cheaper," said Mr. White. "But Ada wouldn't hear of going by air."

"Oh, no: I should have been terrified," said his small, frail wife, with a shudder. "I suffer from vertigo, my

dear. To look down from a height makes me ill. I could *never* travel by aeroplane."

"How nasty for you," Ros sympathised. "But I seem to remember reading that looking down from an aircraft is not like looking down from a tall building. In a plane one is detached from the ground, and the sensation is quite different."

"That may be, but I still shouldn't like it. I prefer a train," Mrs. White declared firmly.

Presently the couple confided that they, too, might move to Menorca if it was as pleasant a place as their friends made out. Mr. White suffered from winter chest troubles, and thought the Mediterranean climate might be beneficial to him. Before she parted from them, Ros had formed the opinion that, in spite of his burly build and ruddy complexion, he was not as strong as little Mrs. White with her bird-thin legs and hollow cheeks.

Later, when Ros arrived at her compartment, the six couchettes were already in position for the night. Although it was evident that the train was not going to be crowded, she was surprised to find the compartment deserted.

Perhaps I shall have it to myself, she thought hopefully.

However a few minutes later she was joined by two men; a short, black-eyed, grey-haired elderly man, somewhat shabbily dressed, and a much younger man whose darkly tanned skin proclaimed that he had not spent the winter and chilly spring in Paris.

The elderly man was talking ten to the dozen in a language which Ros thought must be Spanish, although it sounded nothing like the Spanish record which she had bought as an aid to pronunciation. As he had no luggage, it appeared that he was there merely to see the other off.

Presently they clasped hands, and the younger man bent his tall frame to enable the old one to give him a smacking kiss on both cheeks.

This was not the end of their leavetaking. Having left the train, the father – as Ros took him to be – came to stand outside the open window. They were still in conversation when the train began to move, and it was then that Ros saw the father's eyes fill with tears. As the train pulled slowly away, he kept pace with it, calling out last farewells in a voice hoarse with emotion, two large drops trickling down his seamed cheeks.

At last he disappeared from view and the son turned away from the window and looked, for the first time, at Ros. Not surprisingly he took her for a French girl, and gave her a friendly nod. "*Mademoiselle* . . ."

"*Monsieur* . . ." she responded politely.

It had surprised her to notice that none of the old man's emotion had been reflected in the son's face when he turned from the window. But if the parting had not moved him, neither had it caused him the acute embarrassment which most Englishmen would have felt at being involved in such an unbridled display of emotion in public.

Perhaps they were not father and son, she thought, stealing another swift glance at him as he unzipped his sturdy canvas grip and removed various objects from it. Apart from the fact that short fathers did not commonly have sons who topped six feet, his colouring and features in no way resembled those of the elderly man whose eyebrows had indicated that he, in his youth, had had the blackest of black hair. Her travelling companion had brown hair and tawny eyes.

She wondered if he spoke French, or if his knowledge of the language was as basic as her knowledge of Spanish.

Having unpacked what he needed for the time being, the man zipped his grip and stowed it on the luggage rack which spanned the compartment above the door. Then he glanced at Ros's large suitcase, which was standing on the floor, and said, in excellent French, "Would you like me to put your case on the rack, out of the way, *mademoiselle*?"

"I should be most grateful. Thank you, *m'sieur*," she answered. Her food, and her book for the journey, were in her small overnight bag which she meant to keep beside her.

She would not have been surprised if he had followed this opening with other remarks. But he showed no disposition to chat. He also had a book with him, and he settled himself on the lowest bunks, opposite hers, and found his place and began to read.

The door of the compartment was still open, and people were passing along the corridor, making Ros think that the unoccupied couchettes might yet be taken. There were always people who caught trains with only seconds to spare, and who consequently did not find their places until after the journey had begun.

A voice said, "I hoped you might be near us on the train, and here you are, only four doors away. That *is* nice. Now if we have any little difficulties we can come to you to interpret for us."

"Yes, of course I will, Miss White," said Ros, smiling at the old lady. "But I hope you won't have any difficulties. Are you in the bottom berths, as you hoped?"

"Yes, we are, my dear. Such a relief, because I should never have been able to climb the little step ladder. Luckily the top berths were reserved for two agile young men. Where are the rest of your fellow passengers?"

"I don't know. Perhaps there won't be any other people

in here," Ros said unguardedly.

Mrs. White looked horrified. "Oh, dear me, that will never do!" She bent forward and asked, in a piercing whisper, "Is that man a foreigner?"

Ros flashed a glance at him, but he seemed engrossed in his book. She gave Mrs. White a quick nod, followed by a meaning frown.

Unfortunately Mrs. White did not recognise this signal. "You must ask the guard, or whoever is in charge of the train, to put you somewhere else, my dear," she said decisively, resuming her normal tone of voice. "It would be *most* unwise for a young girl to spend the night alone with a strange man, particularly a foreigner. You could find yourself in a most unpleasant predicament."

Ros glanced again at the foreigner. To her relief, his face remained expressionless. Evidently he did not understand English.

"Oh, I don't think that's likely," she said. "He looks quite respectable."

"So he may be – at present," said Mrs. White. "But if he has too much to drink it might be another matter." She had noticed the bottle which was one of the things the man had unpacked from his grip.

"It's only table wine. He won't become tipsy on that. Continentals drink it every day," Ros assured her soothingly.

"Well, perhaps it will be all right if the door remains open," said the old lady doubtfully. "But don't allow him to close it, or to pull down the blinds. If he attempts to shut you in with him, you must call for help or pull the communication cord."

At the time, Ros had difficulty in concealing her amusement at these dire warnings. But later, when nightfall had blotted out the countryside and turned the windows into

shadowy reflections of the dimly-lit compartment and its two silent occupants, she had to admit that she would have been more at ease travelling with someone of her own sex, or with two other men instead of only this one man.

There was a draught blowing in from the corridor and, on his return from a trip to the washroom, he closed the door after him. Ros was glad to be relieved of the draught, but she could not help tensing slightly in case his next act was to draw the blinds on the corridor side.

I'm being absurd, she told herself impatiently; as absurd as old Mrs. White. The fact that he's a man is not enough reason to be nervous of him. He doesn't look a crank. He doesn't keep glancing at me furtively. Probably he's thinking about his girl, or about his wife and four children.

Presently she went for a wash and, as she passed along the corridor, she noticed that all the other compartments had their blinds drawn. Although it was still mid-evening, the majority of people on the train appeared to have turned in early.

The door of her compartment did not slide easily. As she was tugging at it, her companion came to her aid.

"Merci, *m'sieur*." She returned to her seat and took up her book.

Although each berth had a reading lamp, the light it gave was not good. If only he had been a woman, they could have passed some time chatting.

Or if she had been a different kind of girl; less conventional and more adventurous. She thought of the many girls of her age whom she had seen wandering round Paris, or hopefully thumbing for lifts at the junctions of the *périphérique*, the city's immense, six-lane ring road. Girls in crazy clothes, with all their belong-

ings crammed into a bulging rucksack topped by a bedroll. Girls who hitched their way around Europe, and far beyond Europe, roaming the world as boldly and as freely as boys. Ros never saw girls like that without wondering at their courage and stamina, and sometimes envying them a little. But she knew she had not the temperament to enjoy that kind of careless wayfaring. Her present journey was adventure enough for her.

She did not sleep well. The noise and motion of the train was partly responsible for her restlessness. But also she was excited about her new job, and still a little uncertain that she was doing the right thing. Many times during the night, as the train hurtled south, she roused, and turned over, and relapsed into a shallow, dream-disturbed sleep. Towards morning she slept more soundly, and woke to find that it was daylight and she was alone. Her travelling companion must have gone to the washroom.

By the time he came back she had brushed her hair and folded her blanket, and was looking out of the window at a landscape very different from the forests and lush green meadows of the countryside near Paris. Here there were vineyards, and olives, and an alley of tall dark cypresses leading to the gates of a high-walled cemetery.

When she heard the door slide behind her, she did not move until the man said, in English, "Good morning. Did you sleep well?"

Ros turned to face him. He had changed into a blue cotton shirt with the sleeves rolled up above his elbows, and he smelt of shaving cream and soap.

"Not very well. Did you?"

"Like a log," he said idiomatically. A twinkle lit his hazel eyes. "But of course I wasn't afraid of finding myself in 'a most unpleasant predicament'."

Her eyebrows lifted in astonishment. His English was faultless, without any trace of an accent. "Are you English, too?"

The twinkle became more pronounced. "Would you have felt safer with an Englishman?"

"I wasn't nervous," she said untruthfully. "It was old Mrs. White who was worried. Why did you pretend not to understand what she was saying to me?"

"What could I have said? 'Permit me to inform you, madam, that I'm no more a foreigner than you are, and therefore this innocent girl will come to no harm at my hands'?"

"Well . . . something like that," said Ros, laughing. He's nice, she thought. I like him. How stupid of me to have had doubts about him last night.

"But the first part wouldn't have been true. In spite of my excellent Engish, I am not a true blue Britisher." To support this statement he showed her his green Spanish passport.

"I can hardly believe it. Your English is perfect . . . as good as mine."

He shrugged. "It should be. I spent ten years in England." He turned to put away his wet pack and towel. "If I were you, I would go to the washroom right away. Soon there'll be a queue for it."

"Yes, you're right. I'll go at once."

In the washroom she peeled off her sweater and washed her neck and her ears. Then she cleaned her face with cream and tonic, and applied the light film of moisturiser which was all she put on her skin. When she had done her eyes and mouth, she followed the Spaniard's example and put on a cool cotton shirt. She had planned to change anyway.

When she returned to the compartment, he had folded

away both the upper bunks on his side, and was sitting by the window having his breakfast.

"Did you bring some food?" he enquired. "There's no refreshment car, you know."

"So I was warned." She opened her case to take out the plastic box containing her breakfast, and the small flask of fresh orange juice which she had thought would be more refreshing than coffee.

"Have you been to Spain before?" he asked her, as she sat down in her corner of the window.

"No, never. What part of Spain do you come from?"

"From a village in the hills behind the Costa del Azahar. Do you understand Spanish?"

She shook her head. "Hardly any. In fact when you were talking last night to the old man who saw you off, it was some time before I realised you were Spanish."

"We are Catalans," he explained. "Old Paco speaks nothing but Catalan, but I can speak *castellano*, which is the language of the rest of Spain, and the form of Spanish which foreigners learn. Costa del Azahar means 'the orange blossom coast', but nowadays one can only glimpse of beaches from the orange groves. There's a barricade of hotel blocks and *apartamientos* between the land and the sea. Inland, in the little hill villages, there's no *turismo*, or very little. The people are not as poor as when I was a child, and the girls wear trousers like you, and even bikinis if the village has built a swimming pool. But the essence of Spain is still there . . . the good humour, and the hospitality."

"I suppose you went to England to work? You're not in the catering trade, are you?" Ros knew that, just as the London Underground employed hundreds of West Indians, and the great London stores had many Indians on their staffs, London hotels and restaurants employed

large numbers of Spanish chambermaids and waiters.

"No, I'm not; but you're right in thinking that I went to England from necessity rather than choice. England has much to recommend it, but if one has grown up in Spain there's always a hankering for one's village, and the sun, and good Spanish bread, and a handful of olives . . ."

He unscrewed the lid of a jar. "Meanwhile I am making do with French bread and French olives. Will you have some?" – offering the jar to her.

Ros shook her head. "No, thank you. I don't like olives."

"That's probably because you've only had the soggy green ones which are served at English drinks parties. Wait till you've tried the big black olives before you decide you dislike them."

His breakfast consisted of hunks of bread and thick slices of salami; hers of crispbreads which she spread with unsalted butter and honey from two tiny pots.

"Are you going back to your village now?" she asked, watching him slice the sausage with a clasp knife with a curved black handle.

"Not this time. I'm getting off at Barcelona. And you?"

"I'm going to a place called Vinaroz. Do you know it?"

"Very well. I have cousins who live there. It's a pleasant little town and, at this time of year, not as crowded as it will be in the high season."

It was at this point that they noticed Mrs. White peering at them through the glass pane of the door. The Spaniard rose to his feet and went to open it for her.

"*Buenos dias, señora.*"

"Thank you." With a civil inclination of her head, but

without actually looking up at him, she came to sit beside Ros.

"Good morning, my dear. Did you have a good night? I'm afraid I had a very poor one."

"Did you? What a shame. I was rather restless, too. But my fellow passenger slept very soundly," said Ros, who had not missed the slight shake of the head which, unnoticed by the old lady, the Spaniard had directed at her a moment ago, and which she had taken to mean that it would spare Mrs. White embarrassment if she remained in ignorance of his fluent English.

"Oh, *what* a blessing! I was really quite worried about you. One would think the railway authorities would realise the unsuitability of putting a single woman alone with a male passenger. However, no harm has come of it on this occasion. I noticed he was talking to you when I came to the door. He is French, I presume?"

"No, he's Spanish. When he spoke to you, he was saying 'Good morning' in Spanish."

"Oh, really? All these foreign languages sound alike to me, I'm afraid. So you speak Spanish as well? What a clever girl you must be!"

"Oh no – my Spanish consists of half a dozen words. But he speaks very good French," said Ros, compromising with the truth but at the same time avoiding a lie.

The old lady stayed for about ten minutes before returning to her own compartment. When she left, the Spaniard again opened the door for her. This time she did glance up at his smiling brown face with its mobile eyebrows and humorous mouth.

"Perhaps artificial light doesn't suit him," she murmured to Ros, from the threshold. "This morning he looks quite a nice young man."

"We shouldn't laugh at her," said Ros, after she had

left them. "She must be well into her seventies, and in her day girls were very sheltered. Perhaps in Spain they still are?" she added interrogatively. "But you say they are wearing trousers and bikinis even in the inland villages . . ."

"Yes, but although they dress in the latest fashions, they are fairly restrained in their behaviour. Perhaps it won't last now that Spain is changing so rapidly, but for the moment they are still rather staid compared with their northern sisters."

Did he like them the better for it? she wondered. Even today, masculine attitudes to women were often ambivalent.

Presently the train stopped at Perpignan, and not long afterwards they entered the foothills of the Pyrenees, the mountains which separated Spain from France. At the frontier town of Port Bou everyone had to vacate the French train and change to a Spanish one, passing through Customs in the process.

By this time they had exchanged first names, and Jaime insisted on carrying Ros's case as well as his own, and they continued the journey in each other's company, although they were no longer alone together.

"This part of Spain is not very different from southern France," he told her, as she gazed out at the sunlit landscape of scrub-covered hills, whitewashed farms and well-kept orchards and fields. It was a much greener land than she had expected.

Presently he opened his book, but Ros was too interested in the passing scene to wish to read.

It was past noon when the countryside gave way to the environs of the city of Barcelona.

"Are Mr. and Mrs. White likely to have any difficulty in finding their way to the docks and the ferry to Menor-

ca?" asked Ros. She could not help feeling a certain responsibility towards her elderly compatriots.

"No, no. There'll be plenty of porters and taxis. But if you like I'll see them safely on their way," Jaime offered.

"Would you really? It would be a kindness. Large stations can be rather alarming places to children and old people."

He said, "You know you will have to change trains again?"

She nodded. "Yes, but I shall be all right. I'll go and tell the Whites you will look after them."

She returned from her errand with the information that the Whites would not need his help after all. Since changing trains at the frontier, they had met a retired London butcher who was also bound for Menorca, and with whom they were going to have a meal in the station restaurant.

"In that case, I'll see you off instead," said Jaime.

Although she would have had no difficulty in finding the Vinaroz train had she been on her own, it was pleasant to be looked after. When he had installed her in a seat on the shady side of the train, he said, "I'll leave my grip here and get you a cup of coffee."

As well as coffee in a disposable beaker, he brought her a foot-long crusty roll, some fruit, and two women's magazines, one American and one Spanish. He would not allow her to pay for these things on the grounds that she was a stranger in his country, and it was a small return for the hospitality he had often received from English people.

"You'll find a Spanish *bocadillo* much better than a British Rail sandwich," he said, with a grin. "Good-bye. Have a good time."

Instead of shaking her hand, he raised it to his lips and

kissed it. And then, to her stupefaction, he leaned towards her and kissed her lightly on the mouth.

She had one last glimpse of his brown face and smiling hazel eyes, and then he was gone.

CHAPTER TWO

It was late in the afternoon when the train reached Vinaroz. As it drew into the station, Ros was surprised to see Richard Livingstone among the people waiting on the platform. At the same moment he caught sight of her. Within seconds of the train coming to a standstill, he was taking charge of her luggage.

"I wasn't expecting to be met," she said, as they walked through the booking hall.

"It would have been less than courteous to expect you to find a taxi at the end of so long a journey. If I hadn't been here, Esteban would have met you."

"Who is Esteban?"

"He's my steward and general factotum. His wife does the cleaning and the laundry, so you won't be the only woman on board – if you had been wondering about that aspect," he added, with a sudden searching glance.

She said, without stopping to think, "I hadn't really considered it."

Richard fitted a key in the lock of the boot of his car. "No, girls don't seem to give much thought to their reputations these days."

His tone held a faintly caustic note which impelled her to say firmly, "I certainly care about my reputation, but I suppose I tend to assume that other people are equally . . . respectable until they prove otherwise. I must admit it hadn't occurred to me that, in taking this post, I might be risking my good name. Should it have done?"

At this, his good-looking but oddly cold face became a little less cold. It struck her that he was a man who needed

to be stood up to, but who was more accustomed to having his boots licked.

"By no means," he answered. "But perhaps it would have been wise to check that my apparent respectability was well founded before committing yourself to my aegis."

"I did."

His eyebrows shot up, and a look of surprised amusement transformed him from a man who was good-looking merely to one who was also very attractive.

"You did? May one ask by what means?"

"It wasn't a thorough-going check," she conceded. "I looked you up in *Who's Who*."

As she spoke a surprisingly clear recollection of the details about him came back to her.

> LIVINGSTONE, Richard John; Chairman:
> Livingstone Developments Ltd.,
> *b.* 26 Nov. 1936: *m.* 1958, Valerie Banks (mar. dis.); one *s. Educ.*: Melford Grammar School; London University, B.A.Econ. *Recreations*: Skiing, golf.
> *Address*: Cadogan Square, London.
> *Clubs*: Royal Automobile, Brook's.

He lifted her suitcase into the boot, and came to unlock the front door for her.

"You are extremely naïve if you think an entry in *Who's Who* is some kind of certificate of integrity," he told her dryly. "Some shocking rogues have been, and no doubt still are, listed in it."

Ros took her place in the passenger seat, and waited for him to slide behind the steering wheel before she said equably, "Well, if I come to the conclusion that you are a rogue, I can always give notice, Mr. Livingstone."

His lips twitched, and he let her have the last word on the subject, asking, "Why did you come down by rail? Are you nervous of flying?"

"No, I enjoy it. But the train was not only cheaper but more convenient. By air, I could only have flown as far as Barcelona. It seemed simpler to come all the way by rail."

Mentioning Barcelona reminded her of her Spanish travelling companion and his impudent farewell salute. Probably she ought to feel angry with him. But what girl really minded being kissed good-bye by a man who, although he had not had Richard's good looks to commend him, had been by no means unattractive? Anyway, although he had mentioned that he had some relations in Vinaroz, it was exceedingly unlikely that she would encounter him a second time.

It took only a few minutes to reach the outskirts of the town. On the coast road Ros was again reminded of Jaime for, as he had told her, much of the coast was barricaded from view by the tall, white, balconied buildings built to house Spain's huge summer influx of sun-seekers.

"I have an engagement this evening, so after showing you round I shall have to leave you on your own," said Richard. "But I daresay you'll be glad to go to bed early tonight. Esteban's wife will provide a meal for you. She's thought to be quite a good cook by people who like Spanish food. I'm not keen on it myself. I prefer French or English cooking."

He glanced sideways at her, his grey eyes made doubly inscrutable by the sunglasses he had put on before starting the car. "I shan't expect you to put on any lunch or dinner parties until you've had time to get your bearings."

"Thank you: I expect it will take me a few days to

settle in. Perhaps tomorrow you could spare a little time to discuss your preferences in detail?"

"By all means. I suggest we have breakfast together. I have it at seven o'clock, and I like a proper English breakfast. I can't do a morning's work on a cup of coffee and a roll."

It was Ros's turn to glance sideways, not at his face but at his waistline. At both their previous meetings, he had been wearing an expensive suit, and she knew that expert tailoring could hide many imperfections, including an incipient paunch. But today he was dressed informally in a short-sleeved cotton-knit shirt and Dacron trousers, and his well-knit physique showed no sign of too much rich living. He might eat well, but evidently no more than his body required to fuel it.

His car was a Mercedes sports model, but he did not drive fast, for the road was not wide or well surfaced.

"There's a magnificent *autopista* from the Spanish frontier to Barcelona and Tarragona. Eventually it will extend right down to the very south of Spain. But this stretch of the route is not too good at present. By the way, you do drive, I hope?"

"Yes, and I got an International Driving Licence from the A.A. when I was in England for a few days recently."

"Saying farewell to your admirer?" he enquired sardonically.

As he spoke, he flicked on the left-hand indicator and began to brake in preparation for turning across the spasmodic flow of oncoming traffic. A short distance ahead of them, on the opposite side of the road, a large sign proclaimed the entrance to Laguna Blau, and in French, German , Spanish and English exhorted passers-by to visit this fantastic new holiday village with its Olympic swimming pool, yacht marina, supermarket, nightclub and

landing strip for light aircraft.

It was not, Ros felt, the right moment to clear up the misunderstanding which she herself had brought about. Ignoring his question, she said, "I presume Laguna Blau means Blue Lagoon, but why use the German word for blue?"

"It's also the Catalan word," he explained. "The Castilian-Spanish word is *azul*, but Laguna Azul, with two vowels next to each other, doesn't roll off the tongue as smoothly as Laguna Blau."

"Oh, I see." As the Mercedes swept between the tall stone columns marking the entrance, Ros gazed with quickened interest at the place which, if all went smoothly, might be her home for several years.

Immediately inside the entrance there was a long, low office building with *Informacion* in scarlet letters on the fascia above the swing doors. Alongside was a parking area shaded by esparto grass canopies and hedged with flowering shrubs. Then the wide motor road continued into the heart of the development, with lesser roads circulating through the patchwork-like pattern of building plots, each one clearly defined by a low dry-stone wall, and some of them marked *Se Vende* in black letters on a white board, a notice which Ros took to mean *For Sale*. Most of the plots had one or two gnarled old olive trees on them, but the main avenue was bordered by mature palms which evidently had been transplanted from elsewhere as they were held in position by wire stays.

Presently they came to a large roundabout where a Spaniard dressed in faded blue denim and a shady straw hat was tending the flowerbed surrounding the fountain in the centre. He grinned at them as they passed, and Ros smiled back at him. But Richard merely nodded in acknowledgment, and gave a swift, critical look at the work

the gardener was doing.

Beyond the roundabout about half the plots had houses on them; some already occupied, some only half built. Then the road passed over a waterway, and a few moments later Ros had a glimpse of a group of attractive white houses clustered at the junction of two waterways. She had a fleeting impression of paved and cane-furnished patios with steps lapped by sparkling water, of various small boats moored to balustrades, and of two or three antique-style lanterns rising out of the water to light the way at night.

"Oh, how charming!" she exclaimed, turning to Richard. "Are those waterways natural or man-made?"

"We made them."

He swung the car off the main avenue, cruised down a side road and applied the brakes at a point which gave her a view of the quayside entrance to a large building marked *Supermercado*.

"As you see, people can do their shopping by boat from this side, or by car from the other."

As he spoke a tall, Nordic blonde emerged from the building, followed by a Spanish boy carrying a carton of groceries which he placed in the stern of her bright blue motorboat for her.

"It's like a miniature Venice. It must have cost a fortune to excavate all these canals," Ros murmured.

"It did." He set the car in motion again, but slowly so that she had time for a good look at the Club Blau, as the complex of boutiques and bars surrounding the swimming pool was called.

Beyond the club he picked up speed. The road swept seaward, past a block of apartments to where a wide promenade overlooked the beach. But there were few people on it, and no one in the blue sea.

"At this early stage of the season, most people prefer to bathe in the pool which is heated. The beach will be comparatively deserted until July and August," said Richard, as if he guessed her surprise.

At the other end of the promenade, the road looped inland again, bringing them to the main yacht basin where a dozen or more costly boats were berthed. On the far side of the basin lay an even larger and more impressive yacht with the name *Seabird* painted on her immaculate white bows. As far as Ros could judge, she was about a hundred feet long with a blue and white awning shading her afterdeck, and various aerials and radar equipment on the roof of her wheelhouse.

Richard stopped the car by her gangplank and gave a light toot on the horn. He then unclipped his safety belt, took off his sunglasses, folded them and put them in the pocket of his shirt. As he opened the door, a small, stocky, middle-aged Spaniard came hurrying on deck, fastening the buttons of his steward's jacket of starched white drill.

"This is Esteban," said Richard, as the man hurried round the front of the car to open Ros's door for her.

"*Buenas tardes, señorita.*" A beam creased the steward's swarthy cheeks.

"*Gracias. Buenas tardes.*" Standing up, Ros topped him by several inches. But although he was short, he looked powerful.

"You don't speak Spanish, do you?" asked Richard, as he tossed his car keys to the Spaniard, who caught them and went to unlock the boot.

"No, only a word or two. But naturally I shall make an effort to learn it."

"It doesn't matter if you don't. Esteban speaks quite good English. He can interpret for you in the Spanish

shops if you need to use them. Probably you'll find all you need in the supermarket."

"The best and most economical food is usually in the local markets," said Ros, as she obeyed his gesture to precede him across the gangplank.

"Well, that's up to you. Now I'll show you your cabin, and in ten minutes' time I'll expect you in the saloon. We'll have a quick drink and a very brief tour of inspection before I leave for my appointment. What do you drink?"

"A long drink for me, please. No gin in it. I like wine, but I hardly ever touch spirits. They give me a headache," said Ros as, on deck, he stepped past her to lead the way.

Although he had referred to her "cabin", it was actually a twin-bedded stateroom in which Ros quickly washed her hands after Esteban had placed her suitcase on a folding luggage rack, and left her alone.

It was decorated in pale turquoise and had plenty of fitted storage space, an adjoining shower, and two comfortable armchairs. These were an unexpected luxury. She had thought that space would be at a premium and that, if she wanted to be private during the day, she would have to sit on her bed or possibly a dressing stool.

Only seven minutes had elapsed when she joined Richard in the pine-panelled saloon which spanned the yacht's twenty-foot beam. All the way round the walls, except where the doors were, was a continuous sofa, upholstered with large feather cushions in covers of sea-green linen, a colour repeated in the pattern on the curtains. The fitted carpet was a pale greige Wilton. In addition to the yards of sofa, there were two armchairs, and two long, low, brass-framed plate glass coffee tables.

"I've never been on a large yacht before. I had no idea

they were so spacious," she said, as he handed her a tall glass with ice at the brim. "How large is the crew?"

"Not large. Apart from Esteban and his wife, there are only two others; my English skipper and a Spanish engineer."

"I thought you would be the skipper."

"Sometimes the owner is the skipper, but I prefer to employ a professional yachtmaster. Hatfield is rather an odd, eccentric sort of chap in some ways. But he's second to none at his job, and that's all that matters to me. He and Ramon, the engineer, are on leave at the moment. They'll be back in a day or two. Hatfield usually eats with me when I'm on board. As you will, too, of course. The Spaniards have their meals in the crew's quarters."

In the following quarter of an hour, he showed her the dining saloon, and two smaller guest cabins. These were equipped with bunks, but far more luxurious ones than the couchettes on the train from Paris.

"I gave orders for you to be put in one of the double cabins because, for the time being at least, it won't be required for my guests, and meanwhile you may as well have the extra space. However, later in the season, I may have to ask you to move elsewhere."

"Of course," murmured Ros.

He did not show her his own quarters, although he indicated their whereabouts. Finally, he took her to the galley where Esteban's wife was preparing vegetables at a worktop which, for the present, had a sunset view of the ridge of mountains which lay behind the coastal plain.

Dolores was even smaller than her husband; a tiny, plump, bright-eyed woman with, to Ros's surprise, because she wore no make-up, an elaborate hairdo and vividly lacquered nails.

After introducing her, Richard glanced at his watch. "I

must leave you. If there's anything you want, you've only to ask. I'll see you at breakfast. Good night."

"Good night . . ." Ros echoed, as he left her alone with the Spanish couple.

Dolores spoke to her husband, who then turned to Ros, and translated: "She asks what you like for your supper, *señorita*. You will have much hunger after your journey."

"What are you and Dolores having for supper, Esteban?"

"For us there is *bacalao a la Vizcaina*. But Don Ricardo does not like this, *señorita*, and I think perhaps it would not please you."

Ros asked him to describe the dish in English. On learning that it was made from dried salt cod cooked with onions, tomatoes and peppers which had been fried with garlic in olive oil, she said it sounded delicious.

"But in Spain we do not eat at the same hour as you eat in England. It is better Dolores makes an omelette and a salad for you now," persisted Esteban.

"Because there is only enough *bacalao* for two people?" Ros suggested.

"No, no, there is much *bacalao* . . . enough for four people to eat."

"Then I'll go and have a shower and unpack my suitcase. When the *bacalao* is ready, I'll eat with you, if I may? I'm very interested in Spain and Spanish food. Tonight, while Don Ricardo is out, is a good opportunity for me to begin learning about your country," said Ros firmly.

After her shower, she put on a red cotton caftan and hung away the rest of her clothes. At the bottom of her case, in paperback editions so that they would weigh as little as possible, were several of her favourite books. She could not remember seeing any books in the saloon, which

was disappointing. Margot MacLaren had been an omnivorous reader, and during her time with the American couple, Ros had never run short of reading matter. But it looked as if she might on *Seabird*, unless Richard kept his library out of sight.

The sound of music drifted across the water, and she drew aside the curtain which covered the porthole and, looking out, saw that a party seemed to be starting on the largest of the boats on the other side of the basin.

The party was in full swing when, at half past ten, she switched out the lamp on the table between the twin beds. Presumably all the people from the neighbouring boats were at the party. It would be impossible for them to sleep with that racket going on nearby. Even from *Seabird's* mooring, the music, punctuated by shrieks of laughter, was too loud to permit a restless person to sleep. But tonight Ros was not restless. Within seconds of lying down, she was asleep.

Her alarm clock woke her at six, and by six-thirty she was in the galley, ready to prepare the sort of substantial breakfast which Esteban had described to her the night before.

When, on the stroke of seven, Richard entered the dining saloon, a fresh fruit cocktail presented in half a grapefruit was waiting for him.

"I'm afraid it's an American breakfast this morning. There aren't the ingredients for a truly British breakfast," said Ros, as she came through from the galley.

He rose to his feet and pulled out the chair at right angles to his own place at the end of the table.

"Good morning. How did you sleep?"

"Splendidly, thank you. There was a party going on when I went to bed, but I went out like a light."

"It was going on when I returned at twelve-thirty. I'm glad it didn't disturb you. It kept me awake for some time," he said, with a grimace. "What did Dolores give you for supper?"

"I had some of the Spanish fish dish she had made for themselves."

"From now on they will have to adapt their palates to the kind of food I prefer. You can't exercise your skills with Dolores getting under your feet. I told Esteban to make her understand that in future the galley is your department, and she must confine herself to the duties for which she was engaged."

Ros stood up to take away the grapefruit cups and bring in the ham cakes with eggs which had been Waldo Baxter's favourite breakfast. It was Richard's yacht, and he was entitled to have everything to his liking, but she could not help feeling that his remarks indicated that he had not much interest in the less expensive members of his staff, and would not trouble to express his wishes tactfully.

For Richard, the ham cakes were followed by hot toast with marmalade. Ros had had enough to eat. Instead she made notes of the foods he liked and those he particularly disliked. There were not many of the latter. He did not care for brains and chitterlings, and he wished her to cook with corn oil rather than olive oil, and to use the minimum of garlic. But he seemed to be no more pernickety than a vast number of Englishmen.

"I shall be out for lunch, and tonight I'll have a working meal in my quarters at eight o'clock," he said, when he had drunk his third cup of coffee. "If you want to have a look at either of the nearest towns this morning, you can use the yacht's runabout. Esteban will fetch it from the garage for you, and he can also take you to town if you

prefer to be driven at this stage. But it would be better for you to get used to driving on the right of the road as soon as possible, and parking presents no difficulty at this time of year."

However, Ros preferred to spend the morning checking the equipment in the galley, and making lists of the supplies in hand and those which would have to be procured. The freezer was well-stocked, but the range of pulses and aromatics was most inadequate; and where the equipment was concerned, she was thankful she had brought her own invaluable double pan for sauces, and her treasured battery of black-handled French steel knives to use in place of the stainless steel ones provided.

At mid-morning she used the liquidiser to make herself a vegetable cocktail, and took it on deck to have her break in the sun. It was only then that she realised the yacht was air-conditioned, and that outside it was much hotter than she had expected, hot enough to burn her if she basked for long without protection.

For lunch for herself and the Spaniards, she made fresh tomato bouillon, and a green salad and mayonnaise. Afterwards she put on a bathing suit and sun oil and carefully toasted herself for ten minutes each side. Then she washed her hair in the shower and tucked it in a terry turban while she wrote to Christopher, describing her journey and as much as she had seen of Laguna Blau and its environs.

She did not see Richard again that day because she was busy in the galley when he returned, and Esteban served his supper, reporting that Don Ricardo sent him compliments on another excellent meal.

That night she was not so tired. She read for a while, and then she put out the light and lay watching the stars and wondering how she would get on with Mr. Hatfield –

or was it Captain Hatfield? – Richard's somewhat eccentric skipper.

But it was Richard himself on whom her thoughts lingered. What made him tick? Was he a dedicated and perhaps rather ruthless businessman by nature? Or was it the débâcle of his youthful marriage which had hardened him and given him that air of cynical detachment? And who had custody of the child? she wondered.

For the following two days she and Richard had breakfast together, but he ate his evening meal alone. Whether he really had work to do, or wished to avoid being tête-à-tête with her, she had no means of telling.

By the time she had been at Laguna Blau for forty-eight hours, Ros had realised that although many Spanish people were employed there in various capacities, the development had very little that was essentially Spanish about it. It was like certain hotels which were part of a world-wide chain, and which were so internationalised that a visitor could wake up in one of them and have no clue as to whether he was in New York or London or Tokio. No doubt there were holiday villages similar to Laguna Blau all round the shores of the Mediterranean, and unless she made a deliberate effort to explore beyond the boundaries of this rich people's enclave, eventually she would leave the country knowing as little about the real Spain as when she arrived.

On her fourth morning in Spain, Richard announced that the skipper and the engineer would be back on board before sundown, and that he would join her and Hatfield for dinner at eight-thirty.

"Is Mr. Hatfield a faddy man?" asked Ros.

"Good lord, no! I've seen him tuck away the most extraordinary messes. He fancies his talents in your field,

but I'll leave it to you to keep him out of the galley. He can be an awkward cuss, but not with women," said Richard.

He drained his coffee cup, eyeing her over the rim with an expression she could not define except that she did not like it.

When he had tossed his napkin on the table, and left the dining saloon with his usual brisk, purposeful tread, she refilled her cup and tried to analyse that annoyingly enigmatic look with its hint of unkind amusement.

She had already driven the runabout to the Supermercado and back, to accustom herself to the controls. That morning she drove to Vinaroz. She locked the car before she left it. When she returned from shopping and saw a man's sunburned elbow sticking out of the open passenger window, she could hardly believe her eyes. She was *certain* she had locked both doors. How had he entered the car, and why was he sitting in it?

For some seconds, transfixed by bewilderment, she remained on the spot where she had noticed him. As she began to walk forward, another girl came quickly past her, going in the same direction. Ros scarcely noticed her. But as the girl passed the car, the man leaned his head out of the window and spoke to her in Spanish. The girl gave no sign that she had heard him, and Ros, although she was close enough to catch the words, did not understand what they meant. But she knew instinctively that what she had heard him say had been a *piropo*, an admiring comment on the girl's attractions.

As Ros drew near him, the man turned a smiling glance on her. But whether, had she been a stranger, he would have *piropo*ed her, she was never to know.

"You!" she exclaimed.

"Well, hello." He was equally surprised.

After a moment he opened the door of the car and swung himself into a standing position on the pavement.

"Is Spain coming up to your expectations? Our climate certainly suits you. You're browning already," said Jaime.

"A little. I'm taking the sun in small doses. What are you doing here? In this car, I mean?"

"I've relations in Vinaroz – I thought I told you. The car belongs to the outfit where I'm employed. Whoever is driving it today will give me a lift back to work," he explained. "I was on my way to catch a bus when I noticed it parked here. Luckily I have a key to it, or I'd have been propping up the wall for half an hour."

"You mean *you* work at Laguna Blau?"

"Yes. Have you been taken to see it? Pretty impressive with all those canals, don't you think?"

"Very impressive," she agreed. "And it's where I've been getting my tan. I work there, too."

"Really? Where? In one of the boutiques at the Club Blau?"

"No, on a yacht called *Seabird*."

It was his turn to look dumbfounded. "You aren't . . . you can't be Livingstone's new cook . . . can you?"

"I am. Why shouldn't I be?"

He began to laugh, showing good but uneven white teeth. "I imagined a middle-aged body with grey hair and no nonsense about her. Not a slip of a girl."

"I hope there's no nonsense about me. I may not be middle-aged, but I'm very well qualified."

"Indeed you are! And not only for toiling over a stove," he said, with a look which made her blush for the first time in ages.

To stop him continuing on that tack, she asked, "What do you do at Laguna Blau?"

"I'm *Seabird*'s skipper."

"You can't be. His name is Hatfield."

He bowed from the waist. "Jaime Hatfield, at your service, ma'am."

"B-but Hatfield is an English name."

"My father was English. I never knew him. He was killed in the war – our war – before I was born."

"Well, I'm stunned," she said, taking it in. "I visualised you as middle-aged, probably steeped in whisky and possibly rather a lecher."

"I admit to the lechery, but you don't know much about Richard Livingstone if you think he'd entrust one of the finest yachts in the Mediterranean to anyone steeped in whisky."

"No, now I come to think of it, I suppose he wouldn't."

He reached for her laden carrier. "Have you finished your shopping? Or have you some more things to do?"

"I've finished now, thanks."

"Let's go, then, shall we?" He stowed the carrier on the back seat and walked round the back of the car, not to take the wheel as she expected, but to open the driver's door for her.

"Don't you want to drive?" she asked, surprised.

"I will if you're tired, but I don't want to particularly."

On the way out of town, she said, "Generally, if there's any driving to be done, most men take it as their prerogative."

"Cars don't interest me much. If we were going somewhere by sailing dinghy, I'd consider the helm my prerogative, unless you had shown yourself equally competent."

"*Could* a girl equal you in competence?"

"I haven't met her yet, but it's not impossible. Do you sail?"

"No, I don't know the first thing about it."

"I must teach you. Two-hundred-tonners like *Seabird* are all very well if one wants to go surging about at twelve knots, with every mod. con. including radar, and a month's supply of vintage wines on board. Personally, my idea of pleasure is pottering along in a twelve-footer with a bottle of Estrella Dorada for refreshment, and a home economist for company."

"Is that why you expected a battleaxe? Because Mr. Livingstone described me as a home economist?"

"It was one of the reasons. It does sound fairly formidable, don't you think? The other reason was that I should have expected Richard to be wary of a girl like you."

"Why?"

"Fond as I am of your sex, I can't deny that it includes a large number of cold-blooded trollops who would sell themselves to any old goat if he had enough money. Richard is not an old goat. Consequently he has women buzzing round him like bees round a hive. Hence my feeling that he wouldn't add to his problems by hiring a nubile cook. But he's a shrewd judge of character, so I guess he could see that you wouldn't be baiting any traps for him."

"What makes you think I'm any different from the others?"

"I know a lot about women, *chica*," he told her lazily. "And you strike me as an old-fashioned girl, the kind who believes in true love lasting for ever."

"Yes – I do," she admitted.

"Well, don't fall in love with Richard. You could get hurt. He was married to a girl he was crazy about, and she

let him down – badly. Now he distrusts and despises the entire female sex."

"Have you been with him a long time?"

"Four years."

Six or seven kilometres before the road reached Laguna Blau, there was a fork marked '*por la costa*'. Jaime asked her to take this minor road along the coast which passed through a village called San Pedro.

"I want to call at the *bodega* and pick up a *garrafa* of wine," he explained. "Richard's expensive French wine is wasted on me. I prefer Spanish plonk at eighteen pesetas a litre."

San Pedro had a Spar grocery, a drapery-cum-shoe shop, and a shop selling ironmongery. The *bodega* was down a side street, with a metal fly curtain screening the interior from view. Inside it was a cross between a pub and a wine merchant's cellar. Six huge casks lined one wall. The other wall was ranged with tables and chairs. At the far end, the proprietor leaned on a high counter chatting to two locals.

"Take your pick," said Jaime, indicating the casks.

Ros chose to have a glass of sweet red wine. He asked for Estrella Dorada, which turned out to be iced bottled beer. He also ordered *calamares alla Romana* which, when they came, were hot morsels of squid fried in batter, served in small white boat-shaped dishes with toothpicks with which to spear the titbits.

"Mm . . . *muy delicioso*," said Ros, using a phrase learnt from Esteban.

Jaime raised his glass to her. "*Muy hermosa.*"

She was not sure what it meant, but she didn't need a Spanish dictionary to know it was something flattering. His tawny eyes made that clear. He was obviously a shameless flirt, she thought, but one couldn't help liking

the man. Also, because of him, she was sitting in a genuine *bodega*, not a tourist place, and gaining her first real insight into Spanish life.

She remembered her employer remarking that Hatfield could be an awkward cuss, but not with women. And she remembered, too, the look which had accompanied this piece of information. Perhaps Richard thought she would not be able to handle his philandering skipper.

The *garrafa* which Jaime had come for was a large carboy of thick green glass encased in canework with a handle on either side.

"Are we likely to be at sea much this summer?" asked Ros, as they walked back to the main street where the brake was parked.

"Richard has interests in Corsica and Sardinia, and in the south of France, which he keeps a close eye on. He's also just taken over a development in the Balearics which has been hanging fire for several years because of lack of capital. I reckon we'll spend about half the summer here, and half elsewhere."

When they returned to the yacht basin, Esteban was on the quay talking to a younger Spaniard. The three men shook hands and clapped each other on the shoulder. Then Jaime introduced the younger man to Ros. He was Ramon Garcia, the engineer.

Jamie and Ramon did not have lunch on board. Perhaps they were not expecting to enjoy her cooking, and were avoiding it until the last possible moment, thought Ros, with a grin, after Esteban had told her they had gone to a Spanish café-bar on the coast road.

At eight-fifteen, she was putting the finishing touches to the evening meal when the intercom buzzed.

"Would you care to take a glass of sherry with us before dinner?" asked Richard's voice.

"Thank you. I'll be there in three minutes," she answered.

When she entered the saloon, and the two men rose to their feet, she saw that Jaime was wearing what amounted to a naval officer's tropical uniform, except that it lacked any insignia of rank.

"I hear you and James have already met," said Richard, casting an impersonal eye over Ros's pink and white shirt and pleated pink skirt.

"Yes," she agreed. That Richard called his skipper 'James' was slightly disconcerting when, in her mind, he was already firmly fixed as Jaime.

Glancing at him again while Richard was pouring sherry for her, she realised there was more Englishness in Jaime's appearance than she had noticed before. Somehow the white drill shirt and shorts and the immaculate white stockings not only emphasised the brownness of his knees, but accentuated aspects of his looks which she had not considered in relation to his nationality. It was not merely that he was a much bigger man than most of the Spaniards she had seen during her short time in the country, but the shape of his head and his features were not those of a wholly Latin person. He was not English, but neither was he as Spanish as he claimed to be.

It was not his first name but hers which became a topic of conversation during dinner. By the time they reached the pudding, Jaime had several times addressed her as Ros, causing Richard to say rather repressively, "It seems a pity to abbreviate your Christian name. Is it Rosalind or Rosamund, Miss Slade?"

"Neither, I'm afraid. It's Rostangue."

Richard looked as blank as people usually did when she gave her name in full. Greatly to her surprise, Jaime said, "After the Dame de Pierrefeu?"

"Yes, and my sister is . . . was called Bertrane after the Dame de Signe. How odd that you should know about them. Hardly anyone does."

"I certainly don't. Who are these people?" asked Richard.

"They were two of the great ladies who officiated at the Courts of Love in France in the Middle Ages," she explained. "The Courts of Love dealt with cases which were outside the ordinary laws of the land – disputes between lovers, for instance – according to the Code of Love. My mother was a mediaeval scholar, and she preferred the old French names to modern English ones. My sister and I used to loathe our names when we were children, but we could have done worse. She could have called us Hermysende and Adalazie."

At this point Ramon appeared and said something which Jaime translated as, "Telephone call for you, Richard."

"I'll take it in my cabin."

"How do you happen to know about the Courts of Love?" asked Ros, after Richard had gone.

"By the middle of the twelfth century, they'd sprung up all over the place. There was one here in Catalonia," Jaime answered.

"Really? I didn't know that. I thought they were peculiar to France."

He shook his head, finished his helping of Elephant's Foot, a chocolate and brandy pudding which, in Ros's experience, never failed to please men although its richness horrified figure-conscious women, and put down his fork with the contented expression of a man who has dined unexpectedly well.

"History – European history – has always interested me. I've picked up a lot of out-of-the-way information."

He rested his forearms on the edge of the table and leaned towards her, studying her face with the same smiling glint in his eyes as when he had said *Muy hermosa* which she knew now had meant Very beautiful.

"... the fair Rostangue ... her nose neat; her eyes grey as glass; her mouth full small, and thereto soft and red," he quoted teasingly.

For the second time that day he brought a warmth of colour to her cheeks which was so absurd, and so unlike her, that Ros began to wonder if she would be able to cope with him.

"Talking of names, I'm a little confused about what to call you. Jaime or James?"

"Jaime. Richard is the only person who insists on using the English form of it."

She wondered how long Richard was likely to be absent, and cast about for a way to make Jamie stop gazing at her.

"Will you have some more pudding?" she suggested.

He shook his head. "If you remember, one of the rules in the Code of Love is: Whoso is assailed by thoughts of love sleeps less and eats less."

"Another one is: A *true* lover is always diffident," she retorted dryly.

He laughed. "Do you know them off by heart?"

"No, only a few. It is not seemly to love a woman whom one would be ashamed to marry, and, Love is always banished by avarice." She paused, trying to think of some others.

"Richard would endorse that one." His hazel eyes were momentarily serious. Then the glint returned. "At least I can be sure that if a girl seems to like me, it's not merely cupboard-love."

"Have you never been married?" she asked, after sud-

denly wondering if perhaps, like his employer, he had an ex-wife in the background.

He shook his head. "If I ever had a wife, I should still have her."

"Oh, yes . . . you're a Catholic. I was forgetting that."

"I'm not, as it happens. I was brought up to be one, naturally. But nobody who reads history can subscribe to any of the religions. They've all caused more suffering than happiness, and continue to do so."

"That was my mother's opinion, too. I don't remember her, but my grandfather told me all about her, and I've read the papers she left. She wrote a thesis on the Albigensian Crusade, and how it had destroyed the wonderful civilisation which had existed in the southern part of France before the then Pope gave thugs like Simon de Montfort a licence to torture and murder hundreds of so-called heretics."

"So you have no religion either?"

Ros shook her head. "No, I believe that heaven and hell are on this earth. I wish I *could* believe in another life, for the sake of all the poor people who are born to be hungry and homeless or otherwise wretched. But as for people like ourselves – the lucky ones – why should we expect any more than one life has to offer? Think of all the beauty and pleasure –"

She broke off, partly because Richard had come back, and partly out of embarrassment at her own earnestness.

"I want to go over to Menorca, James," said Richard, sitting down to resume his meal.

Jaime straightened. "Now?"

"Now."

"Right." Jaime stood up, pushed in his chair, gave Ros the flicker of a wink, and left them.

Ros went to sleep with the throb of *Seabird*'s twin five-hundred-horsepower diesel engines in her ears. She awoke to the same steady thrumming. When she looked out of her porthole, there was nothing to be seen but the opal-coloured, dawn-lit sea.

It was mid-afternoon when *Seabird* entered the long, hill-sheltered harbour at the eastern end of the island of Menorca. She glided past a number of islets and eventually berthed in deep water below the cliff-top, rust-red façade of the old Port Mahon hotel.

No sooner was the yacht at anchor than Richard went ashore in the tender. A car was waiting for him on the road which led uphill to the town.

Ros, watching his departure from the galley, could not help feeling a slight pang of disappointment at not being able to see something of the island. But they were putting to sea first thing tomorrow, and meanwhile she had to organise dinner for eight. This number did not include herself or Jaime who, Richard had told her, generally ate ashore when they came to the island.

Presently Jaime came to the galley. "If there's anything you need which you haven't got, I can easily run ashore for you," he offered.

"Thank you, but I think I have everything. What sort of place is Menorca?" Ros asked, her eyes straying again to the view from the ports.

"Quite different from mainland Spain, or from Mallorca further south. The English were in control here for the better part of a century, and their influence lingers in all kinds of ways. The weather can be bad in winter, and there's a devilish wind called the *tramontana* which blows straight off the Pyrenees and keeps up for days on end. But there are some superb beaches, and the skin-diving is much better here than it is around Laguna Blau."

"You usually eat ashore, I hear?"

"Yes, I know one or two good places. It's a pity I can't take you with me. But we'll be here again, and probably for longer next time."

"Do you know why we've come here in such a hurry?"

"No, but it's typical of the way Richard operates. As for this impromptu party, it's probably a test for you."

Although her culinary prowess had risen to much more exacting occasions than the dinner party which took place on board *Seabird* that night, because it was her first important assignment for Richard Livingstone, Ros could not help being a little less calm than usual.

The Baxters had always introduced her to their guests. But for all the notice Richard took of her, she might have been a maid hired for the evening.

Soon after midnight the guests were taken ashore, and half an hour later *Seabird* was heading for the open sea. Ros, who, once dinner was over had retired to her cabin to study Spanish, stood at her porthole watching the slow-sliding sequence of black and gold views of the harbour by night.

Well, that was Menorca – that was! she thought, as she started to undress. But, as Jaime had said, there would be other opportunities to see the place. What *did* irk her slightly was the fact that not even by one swift smile had Richard shown he was pleased with her efforts.

Perhaps I shouldn't expect it of him. After all, I was only doing what I'm paid to do – and paid very generously at that, she reflected, as she brushed her hair. But I'm not sure I wouldn't rather have a lower salary and an employer who was as appreciative as Margot always was.

In bed, she again applied herself to enlarging her Spanish vocabulary. But the gentle motion of the yacht

and the purring vibration of the engine were soporifics which, combined with the fatigue which follows any degree of nervous tension, soon made her irresistibly sleepy. Her fingers were on the light switch when the bedside intercom buzzed.

"Hello?"

"I was afraid you might be asleep, but you wouldn't have answered so quickly had I woken you." It was Richard's quiet but resonant voice which sounded as close as if he were speaking from the other side of the panelling behind her bed.

"I wasn't asleep. I am in bed – but it won't take five minutes for me to dress if I'm needed," she added.

"No, no. I merely wanted to tell you that everyone was very favourably impressed by the meal you put on this evening. You did very well. Thank you. Goodnight, Rostangue."

Before she could reply, there was a click and the line went dead.

Ros switched off the light and snuggled down between the fine white perçale sheets. But whereas a few seconds before she had been unable to keep her eyes open, now she was wide awake again.

Goodnight, Rostangue. Not since she was little, with her parents alive, had anyone called her by her full name. But evidently Richard intended to do so. And he *had* appreciated her efforts after all. A tingle of pleasure ran through her.

The week after the flying visit to Menorca, a yacht belonging to a German industrialist arrived at Laguna Blau. On board were a couple called Elberfeld, guests of the owner, Herr Holzminden. The Elberfelds were so impressed by Laguna Blau that they decided to buy one of

the most expensive plots. Then Frau Elberfeld received news that her married daughter had had a miscarriage, and insisted on returning at once to Duisburg. Her host offered to take them by sea to the airport at Alicante. But Herr Elberfeld particularly wished to see the progress of the east coast *autopista*, and as Richard happened to be motoring to Barcelona the following day, he volunteered to take them to the airport there.

The night before, he summoned Ros to his stateroom. It was large enough to accommodate a double bed, but the alcove designed to frame an opulent bedhead and night tables formed instead the background to a handsome mahogany pedestal desk. There was a single bed with the high scrolled ends of the Regency period pushed sideways against the wall which faced the portholes. It was piled with cushions to give the appearance, by day, of being a sofa.

Ros noticed these details while waiting for Richard to finish dictating on to tape. He had switched off the recorder when she entered to say briskly, "Sit down. I won't keep you long." Then he had resumed his dictation, his attention on some lists before him on the desk.

The stateroom gave her the impression that it had been designed by a professional decorator whose brief had been to produce an atmosphere of restrained, masculine luxury. Ros wondered if Richard really liked antique furniture, or if he regarded it as an investment. He had not seemed to know much about the four fine marine paintings in the dining saloon when she had asked about them.

His dictation completed, he said, "As you know, I am driving the Elberfelds to Barcelona first thing tomorrow. I have one or two people to see there, so I won't be returning immediately, probably not before the evening. Would you care to make use of the spare seat and have a

look round the city?"

"Yes, please," Ros exclaimed eagerly.

A few minutes later, on her way to the galley, she met Jaime. He said, "You look pleased with life."

She told him about Richard's invitation. "You know Barcelona well, Jaime. What are the best things to see?"

"That depends on your point of view. One of the conventional tourist attractions is the Pueblo Español, the Spanish Village. It's an open-air museum of Spanish architecture which gives you a potted impression of the whole country and all its contrasts. But if I were you I wouldn't go in for that sort of sightseeing. I'd just wander round the streets of Barcelona, especially the Ramblas and the old, narrow alleys of the Gothic Quarter."

She remembered his words the next day when Richard deposited her in the Plaza de Cataluña with instructions to be at the same spot at six o'clock sharp. From the *plaza* with its fountains and flowerbeds, a wide, paved, tree-shaded promenade, flanked on either side by motor roads, stretched for half a mile to the city's waterfront. This impressive thoroughfare, with its magazine stalls, its cages of songbirds, its flower stalls and its cafés, was the famous Ramblas.

When, hours later, she returned to her rendezvous with her employer, Ros was very tired but, thanks to taking Jaime's advice, her mind was teeming with impressions far more colourful and vivid than those she would have received from a hurried tour of museums and churches.

"I thought – unless you are hungry now – we would stop for supper in Tarragona," said Richard, when he had picked her up. "You had some lunch, I presume?"

"Yes, I've had plenty to eat. *Churros* . . . a huge *bocadillo* . . . coconut ice cream."

"What are *churros*?"

"They're like long fluted sticks of doughnut. You buy them in paper cones. They're piping hot and quite delicious. They seem to be the equivalent of chips in England. I found a warren of back streets where every other shop sells some sort of take-away food."

"Couldn't you find a restaurant?"

"I expect I could have done. I didn't really look for one. It seemed more fun to picnic. I wouldn't eat in the street in London, but somehow abroad it's different."

"Well, as you know, I don't care for Spanish food, and I should be wary of eating from back street establishments which might not be as clean as they should be. However, if you enjoyed yourself –" He finished the sentence with a slight shrug.

"The hygiene in smart London restaurants is not always all that it might be," Ros answered dryly. Her enthusiasm damped, she asked politely, "Did you have a successful day?"

He nodded, most of his attention on the traffic. For the rest of the way out of the city they did not speak, and it was not until they had passed through the first row of tollgates some way south of Barcelona that he asked her what she had seen, and if she had been impressed by the city.

It was so obvious that politeness rather than interest dictated these questions that Ros found herself replying in a lukewarm manner which must have given him the impression she had enjoyed herself hardly at all.

"I've run out of small change. Do you happen to have fifteen pesetas?" Richard asked when, after another prolonged silence, they were approaching the second barrier.

She looked in her purse and found three five-peseta coins. For travellers with the correct money on them, at this barrier there were gates where the toll could be tossed

into plastic pouches instead of being handed to attendants. The Mercedes slowed, Richard dropped the coins into the pouch, and the green light signalled them to pass. With the minimum of delay they resumed their almost flight-like journey along the fast lane of the *autopista.*

The restaurant in Tarragona where they dined offered an international cuisine.

"As we don't want to hang about waiting for things to be cooked, how about a prawn cocktail and *coq au vin*?" Richard suggested, after a cursory glance at the menu.

Ros agreed, and he gave the order to the waiter and conferred briefly with the wine waiter.

"I should have preferred a steak," he said to her. "But I find they're generally tough in Spain. I've been told it's because they don't let meat hang long enough."

"Really?" Inwardly, Ros was amused. She had a theory that a person's taste in food was a much better guide to their temperament than their zodiacal sign or the shape of their chin or the distance between their eyes.

According to her theory, a man who looked at a menu and at once picked out prawn cocktail or steak was a man with a good appetite and an instinctive recognition of high-protein foods, but with very little palate, and probably only a limited appreciation of the other sensual pleasures.

Perhaps that's what went wrong with his marriage, she thought. Perhaps his attitude to women is like his attitude to food; perhaps he enjoys sex but can't be bothered with all the romantic trappings which are important to us. He's good-looking, and he's successful, but perhaps he has no tenderness in him. Yet Jaime said he 'adored' his wife.

"One can't accuse you of being a chatterbox," Richard remarked, in a dry tone.

"I thought you didn't wish to talk," she answered uncomfortably. It was not like her to be inquisitive about aspects of her employers' lives which were nothing to do with her. She had never felt any curiosity about Margot's first and second husbands, and Waldo's previous wife. What Richard might be like as a lover was something for his girl-friends to ponder, not his cook. To her, it should be a matter of indifference.

"I thought you were probably tired," she added, thinking how astonished and annoyed he would be if he knew the thoughts he had interrupted.

"Rather less tired than you, I should imagine, if you were on your feet for six hours."

"Oh, but I wasn't. I had several rests in pavement cafés. Anyway, I'm used to standing, and I was off duty. You've been working all day."

"You didn't have any trouble in the cafés?"

"Trouble?" she echoed blankly.

"You weren't pestered by Spaniards? They have the reputation of being a considerable nuisance to unescorted girls from northern Europe."

"No, I didn't have any trouble. I suppose, now I come to think of it, they do seem to stare more than Englishmen. But I wouldn't call that being 'pestered'. In fact the only Spaniard who –" she stopped short.

"Go on," Richard prompted.

Regretting her unguarded tongue, Ros said evasively, "There was a man on the train who was a bit . . . familiar. But he wasn't a serious nuisance."

The prawns arrived, and while they ate them Richard talked about the Spanish from his point of view.

"This is a very inspiriting country for anyone who has had to put up with the strikes, and the delays and shortages caused by strikes, which bedevil England and Italy,

and indeed all the countries in Europe to a greater or lesser degree," he said.

"Is the whole of Spain booming? Or merely the tourist areas?" she asked him.

"All the places where there are industries are booming. But whether the people in the more remote agricultural areas are sharing the prosperity, I wouldn't know. You'd have to ask James about that. He spends most of his leaves in the backwoods."

She would have liked to ask him what he had meant when he had described Jaime as 'an odd, eccentric sort of chap'. But as she had not questioned the description at the time, she hesitated to do so now. It was possible Richard had let slip a remark he regretted – as she had nearly done a little while ago – and that now, if she referred to it, he would snub her.

But whatever his reaction might have been had she vented that particular topic, as the meal progressed she was conscious that his manner towards her was nicer than it had ever been before. Suddenly he seemed to have relaxed with her; not to the extent that Jaime was relaxed with everyone, but to a degree which made Ros wonder if tonight was an appropriate moment to tell him she had not ditched a man in England because of his double-salary offer.

But if she disabused him of that idea, she would also have to tell him about Christopher. And she felt it might still be too soon to broach *that* subject, heavily as the problem weighed on her.

Back in the car, Richard switched on the radio, and Ros recognised a tune which Jaime sometimes whistled.

Buenas noches, mi amor . . . Goodnight, my love.

With a little sigh of contentment, she leaned back against the head-rest and closed her eyes for a moment,

the better to concentrate on making out the following words.

The next thing she knew was that the car had stopped on the crown of the road and a huge lorry was coming towards them. When it had thundered past, Richard drove through the entrance to Laguna Blau.

"We've arrived!" she exclaimed, in confusion. "I must have dropped off. I'm so sorry."

"There's no need to apologise."

By the time they reached the yacht, she had shaken off her drowsiness and was alert again. Esteban was sitting on a bollard, smoking, when they came into view.

"You enjoy yourself, eh, *señorita*? Barcelona is a very fine city, yes?"

"A magnificent city, Esteban."

"You like some coffee now?"

"Yes, please."

"And you, Don Ricardo? Some coffee?"

"Yes. Bring it to my quarters, will you, please?"

That should have warned her, but it didn't. She turned a happy face up to her employer, and said warmly, "It was kind of you to take me, Richard. I enjoyed it enormously. Thank you for dinner, too. It's been a lovely day off."

There was no responsive warmth in his face as he looked down at her. "Don't thank me. It was James' idea that you might want to see Barcelona. Goodnight."

Leaving her standing on the quay with the steward, he strode on board and disappeared.

What have I done? she thought helplessly.

What have I done?

CHAPTER THREE

NEXT morning, while Ross was cooking porridge in her double saucepan, Jaime came into the galley.

"'Morning, Ros. How was Barcelona?"

"Good morning. Barcelona was fine. I hear I have to thank you for getting me included in the trip."

He tilted an eyebrow. "Did I suggest it? Could be. We Catalans rate Barcelona pretty highly, you know. Higher than Madrid, in fact."

"It certainly has marvellous shops," she said. "I was hopeful of tracking down porridge, but to find kippers as well *was* a surprise."

He lounged against the worktop, near her but not in her way. "The finest fish in the world is a herring cooked straight from the sea. I once did a trip on a Scottish trawler, and the cook used to fry them fresh out of the nets. They were so delicious, you could eat a dozen at a sitting."

"I wish Richard was a gourmet like you. There are so many things I could cook for him."

"Not being a gourmet is healthier," Jaime said ruefully. "If Richard had my appetite, he'd also have a weight problem – as no doubt I shall in twenty years' time when I'm less energetic."

"You'll just have to make a choice between fascinating the *señorita* and eating," Ros said, smiling at him. "Perhaps by that time you'll have a plump *señora* who won't mind your being slightly stout."

"Perhaps."

"By the way, when we were coming home last night,

Richard asked me if I'd been bothered by Barcelona's *donjuans*," Ros went on. She had learned from Dolores, through Esteban, that this form of the name of Spain's famous rake was in current use as the equivalent of 'wolf'. "It was on the tip of my tongue to tell him that the only *donjuan* I'd encountered was you. But I managed to bite back."

Jaime grinned. "You mean you spent a whole day in Barcelona and nobody murmured a single *piropo* in your ear? How disappointing! Never mind: I'm only too willing to make up for my countrymen's deficiencies."

With one swift movement he was behind her, trapping her between the counter while he said something in throaty Catalan and planted a kiss behind her ear.

"Oh, Jaime, stop it!" she expostulated, a second before Dolores entered the galley.

It seemed to Ros that the Spanish woman's exclamatory shriek must be heard all over the yacht, and certainly in the dining saloon. She could only hope that Richard had not chosen this morning to be a few minutes early for breakfast, and that he would not, at any second, open the connecting door to ask what the noise was about.

As it turned out, Richard was a few minutes late. Having bade her and Jaime good morning, he ate his breakfast in preoccupied silence.

It was when he had finished his kippers that Jaime said to him, "Considering that Ros spent part of her day off tramping round the Barcelona food shops to procure those two exotic delicacies for you, you might show a glimmer of appreciation."

The freezing stare with which this rebuke was received made Ros tense. In view of last night's setdown, she had not expected him to praise her for setting a Scottish breakfast before him, and the last thing she wanted was

for Jaime to lay his head on the block for her.

But although she quailed at Richard's glare, Jaime returned it with a calm, level look, and after a moment Richard's expression became less arctic.

Glancing at Ros, he said stiffly, "I'm sorry. I hadn't realised you had made a special effort to get hold of this morning's breakfast. I've always liked porridge, and the kippers were excellent. Thank you."

"I'm glad you enjoyed them," she said quietly.

Jaime was still drinking coffee when Richard left the breakfast table.

"I know you meant it kindly, but I wish you hadn't said anything to him," Ros remonstrated.

"Why not? Did you think I was risking instant dismissal?"

"It wasn't the sort of remark people usually make to their employers. You were virtually telling him off."

"Richard pays for my services, but I am my own man, and he knows it and accepts it," said Jaime. "If he did something of which you didn't approve, would you let it pass just because he happened to be your boss?"

"I suppose it depends on what it was. If he kicked a cat I should say something. But I don't think I'd take him to task for, say, not complimenting Dolores on ironing his shirts well. It's her job, and my job is to pamper his taste buds. Why was Dolores so agitated before breakfast? Was she telling *you* off? It sounded like it."

"Yes, she was very annoyed with me. She seems to have formed the opinion that, unlike most girls from the north, you are a good girl, and therefore not to be trifled with."

"Why do girls from the north have this terrible reputation in Spain? Richard mentioned it yesterday."

Jaime shrugged and spread his hands. "Haven't you

met people in England who think the whole of Spain is like Benidorm in August, or that tourists are flung into jail for wearing bikinis, or, conversely, that it's a country of backward peasants and beggars? The Spanish also have some false ideas about foreigners. They hear of the Permissive Society, and they see a bra-less blonde propping up a bar and think she is typically English or German or Scandinavian."

"Being a foreigner is quite a responsibility, isn't it? One's least fall from grace can do so much harm to one's country."

"I don't think you need worry about being a bad ambassador. Your only shortcoming is that you could be taken for a Spanish girl. I notice your ears are pierced. Surely that's unusual in England?"

"Perhaps it's less common than here, but it's not very unusual. I had mine done because I was left a lovely pair of dangling Victorian ear-rings. I only wear them on state occasions. They're too elaborate for every day."

"You can wear them at the Lockwoods' party. I hear they're arriving on Tuesday."

"Who are the Lockwoods?"

"They're the owners of Casa Gwenfred, that big house with the garden crowded with statuary. As you might guess, their first names are Freddy and Gwen. About fifteen years ago, Freddy opened a transport café for lorry drivers called the Kozi-Kaff. Now there's a chain of the places and the Lockwoods have more money than they know how to spend. They were the first private people to build at Laguna Blau and whenever they come here they start their holiday by throwing a fantastic party."

He glanced at his watch. "I must go. '*Dios*." As he passed her chair he touched the lobe of her ear

in which, this morning, she was wearing a blue bead to match her blue shirt.

"'*Dios*, Jaime."

As he left the saloon a smile curved her mouth. Dolores might find his behaviour towards her improper, but Ros herself had no fears that Jaime would ever overstep the limits of lighthearted flirtation. He was just not the sort of man who went in for seducing inexperienced girls, and no doubt to his knowledgeable eyes inexperience was written all over her.

I suppose in a set-up like Laguna Blau there must be plenty of older women willing to have a discreet liaison with him, she reflected. I wonder why he's never married? He seems too warm-hearted a person to be content with transient sexual relationships with dissatisfied wives and divorcees.

Then she put Jaime out of her mind, and for the rest of the day it was Richard, and his incomprehensible volte-face from friendliness to something close to hostility, who occupied her thoughts.

The next day she heard from Christopher. The airmail envelope with the schoolboy's unformed handwriting on it was given to her by Richard when they sat down to lunch.

He said, "I couldn't help noticing that your letter has the same postmark as the one I've had from my son today. Have you a brother at the school?"

"No, Christopher is my nephew."

Richard raised his eyebrows. "A boy who corresponds with his aunt – a very rare bird! Most of them find it an effort to write to their parents occasionally."

"Christopher has no parents. They were killed in a car crash last year and I'm in charge of him now." She

hesitated before adding, "It was because of him that I wouldn't go to America with the Baxters. If you remember, I told you there was someone in England who needed me. That gave you a . . . a false impression which I didn't bother to correct because, at the time, it didn't matter."

"I see." He gave her a long, thoughtful look. "Is your nephew one of the senior boys?"

"No, he's only just gone there. He's thirteen. His surname is Oldmeadow."

"He must be in the same form as Rob. But perhaps they're in different houses. Rob is in Madoc."

"Christopher is in Burgess. Probably they don't have much contact outside the classroom. I've never heard him mention a boy called Livingstone."

Jaime had been listening in silence to this conversation, but now Richard included him by saying, "James disapproves of public schools."

"Oh, really – why?" Ros enquired.

For the first time in their acquaintance, Jaime's expression was oddly grim.

It was Richard who answered her. "Because he went to one, and he didn't care for the experience."

"I don't think my education can be of much interest to Ros. I expect she'd rather read her letter," Jaime said casually.

"Well, yes . . . if you wouldn't mind, Richard. I would like to skim through it quickly."

"By all means."

She slit the envelope, and extracted a single sheet of paper.

Dear Aunt Ros, Christopher had written,

Thanks for your letter. The yacht sounds super. I hope you will be able to fix up somewhere for me to stay in the summer holidays. What about saying you need a kitchen

boy to help peel the spuds, etc.? Then I would be able to live on board, and earn some money as well.

The letter went on to say that he had been sick in the coach taking the school choir to see *The Mikado* in London, that someone had pinched his cartridge pen, and he would soon need larger shoes.

By the time Ros finished the letter, the men were discussing Middle East politics, a topic which outlasted the meal.

She spent part of the afternoon making almond butter and green butter for the freezer. Then she went on deck for her sunbathe, and found Jaime there. He was reading, and she would not have disturbed him had he not closed his book and put it aside.

On impulse, she said, "Jaime, do you think you could help me to find a local family who would give my nephew board and lodging for the holidays? If it could be arranged, I'd like him to spend the summer here. There's so much for a boy of that age to do . . . swimming, skin-diving, water-skiing. It would help to take his mind off the accident."

"I daresay it could be arranged," Jaime said slowly. "But have you considered what it would be like for him to live with strangers? – foreign strangers whose language he can't understand."

"Yes, I know it would be difficult for him, especially at first. But naturally I should spend all my free time with him, and I think the pleasures would compensate for the drawbacks. It's not as if he were a small boy. He's nearly fourteen."

"No, as you say, he's not a small boy, and probably a large, crowded Spanish family would be less alien to him than an English household to a Spanish child." He fell silent, pondering the matter.

Ros draped a beach towel over a lounger. She was still being careful to apply plenty of oil before she sunbathed, and she did not want to leave oily marks on the lounger. She had been basking for only a few minutes when Esteban came to tell her that Richard wished to see her in his quarters.

Fastening a towelling tabard over her bikini, she stepped into her mules and went below.

Richard's stateroom was cool and dim after the heat and the bright light on deck. He was seated at his desk when she entered, and he half rose, and indicated the chair facing him. There were no papers on his blotter. He did not seem to have been working.

He said, "You're very young to be in charge of an adolescent boy. Are there no other members of the family to share the responsibility with you?"

It had not occurred to her that he had sent for her to talk about Christopher. She had thought that by now he would have forgotten she had a nephew.

"I have various relations, but they're old people, or they have too many responsibilities of their own. Christopher isn't a difficult boy. Even before the accident, he was always rather a subdued child."

"Nevertheless I think you will find there are problems. A boy needs a man's influence, and a girl needs a woman's. I shouldn't care to have a teenage daughter on my hands."

Ros could find nothing to say to this and, after a pause, he went on, "I don't know what arrangements you have made for the boy for the summer holidays, but it occurs to me that he and my son might be good company for each other. I try to spend a good deal of time with Rob during the holidays, but inevitably there are days when he has to be left to his own devices. An English boy of

his own age would be a more congenial companion than anyone he is likely to meet down here. Is your nephew an athletic boy?"

"I don't think he's particularly good at rugger and cricket, but he's very keen on swimming. Are you . . . are you suggesting that Christopher should actually stay on board *Seabird*?"

"That was my idea, if you agree to it. They could fly down together, and share Rob's cabin."

"I think it's a wonderful idea. It would be a great relief to me. I've been rather worried about the summer," she admitted.

"In that case I'll instruct Miss Stobs to book another flight. You needn't worry about the expense. I'll be happy to pay the boy's fare if it means Rob won't be left at a loose end as sometimes happened last year."

"On the salary you're paying me, the financial side of being Christopher's guardian is no longer a problem," said Ros. "I would feel happier about the arrangement if I paid Christopher's fare, and something towards his keep, too."

"Oh, nonsense," said Richard impatiently. "He will be my son's guest. There's no question of paying for his keep."

"That would be all right if he were coming for a fortnight only. Eight weeks is another matter. I don't think it would be comfortable for him to be your son's guest for so long, and it certainly wouldn't for me. I'd rather he came on the basis that it's a convenient arrangement on both sides, but that Christopher need not feel himself under an obligation, and that I need only be indebted to you for kindness," Ros said quietly.

He frowned, his well-shaped mouth tightening. For a horrid moment she thought she had annoyed him in-

to changing his mind. All at once his face cleared. He said, "You're like James. He can't stand being beholden to anyone. Well, it's entirely unnecessary, but if it makes you happier by all means pay your nephew's fare, and whatever you consider to be the cost of his food."

"Anything wrong?" asked Jaime, when Ros returned on deck.

"On the contrary – everything right," she said happily. And she told him why Richard had sent for her, and all that had been said, including his generous offer to pay Christopher's air fare, and his initial refusal to accept even a nominal contribution towards the boy's board.

"He said I was like you – that you disliked being beholden."

Jaime said, "It depends on the circumstances. It's a poor sort of person who can never accept a favour, but some generosity has too many strings attached to it." A twinkle lit his eyes. "Perhaps that's an unfortunate choice of words. I didn't mean to imply that Richard's benevolence might have the usual ulterior motive. I was thinking of a different set of circumstances. As far as Richard is concerned, like most men in his position he's so accustomed to being sponged on that he expects it."

"Do you think so? How wretched for him! As you said the other night, I would rather be hard up and know I was liked for myself."

"In a different way, you're in much the same position," he said quizzically. "An attractive girl can never tell if a man is interested in her mind or her body. You wouldn't prefer to be unattractive in order to be sure your mind was appreciated, would you?"

"No, but then I'm not so pretty that people dismiss me as a half-wit, nor so clever that a brilliant man could love

me for my intellect and hardly notice the rest of me. I think for a woman it's preferable to be moderately nice-looking and moderately bright. I've never yearned to be a beauty, or to have a better brain. But it's curious that none of us has inherited my mother's intellect."

"Was your father also a scholar?"

"No, he was a solicitor by profession, but his inclinations were to practical work – gardening and tinkering in his workshop. He made Bertrane a wonderful dolls' house which she didn't much like and I loved. My grandmother says I take after him. What about you? Do you come from a seafaring family on your English side?"

He shook his head. "If heredity sent me to sea, it came from my Spanish forebears."

"I thought you said they lived in one of the hill villages" – waving a hand at the mountains shimmering in the heat haze.

"They do. But my mother's mother came from San Carlos de la Rapita, which then was a small, quiet fishing village by the Ebro delta. She was the daughter of a fisherman whose family had fished for generations, and who are still making their living at it. One of these days I'll take you to see them, if you like?"

"Oh, Jaime, would you? I'd love it." Her glance fell on the book he had been reading earlier. She saw it was a Spanish one. "You haven't any English books, have you? I'm stuck for something to read in bed."

"You can take your pick of what I have, but I may not have much in your line. Come down to the cabin and have a look. What sort of books do you like?"

"The few books I tote around with me are mostly by women writers – Nancy Mitford, Georgette Heyer, Evelyn Anthony."

"I've read several Anthony thrillers. I like them, too,"

remarked Jaime.

His cabin was smaller than hers, and so tidy that, at first glance, it gave the impression of being unoccupied. Behind and above the bed were shelves housing about a hundred and fifty books. It was easy to spot his favourite writers – Laurens van der Post, Joseph Conrad, W. Somerset Maugham and Robert Louis Stevenson, who was also one of her favourites.

"I see you like Tolkien," she said, noticing *The Lord of the Rings*.

"Yes, do you?"

"No, I've tried to like him, but I can't. Fantasy doesn't appeal to me."

"Not even this?" He leaned over her shoulder to point out a small book sandwiched between two large volumes.

"Oh, *The Wind In The Willows* – yes, I love it. But –"

A tap at the door interrupted her. The door was already ajar, and when Jaime called "*Adelante*", the person outside had only to push it further open. It was not Esteban or Ramon, as Ros had expected. It was Richard.

"Would you come to my room, please?" he said to Jaime.

"Help yourself to anything you fancy," Jaime told Ros. A moment later, she had the cabin to herself.

When she had chosen *The Narrow Corner* by Maugham, and *News From Tartary*, a travel book by Peter Fleming, Ros returned to her cabin to change, her mood no longer as carefree as it had been a short time ago. For when Richard had opened the door and seen her, half-kneeling on the edge of Jaime's bed, she had known at once that he did not approve of her being there.

Jaime went ashore that evening, and for the first time since her arrival Richard and Ros dined alone together. He questioned her about Christopher, and discussed

education, comparing his own schooling with that of his son.

It was not until they reached the cheese that he said, "I realise there was nothing remotely questionable about your presence in James's cabin this afternoon. Nevertheless I think you would be wise to avoid going there again, except when you know he will be elsewhere. You would have to ask his permission to borrow further books, naturally. But a measure of discretion could save you both from embarrassment."

"Embarrassment?" she repeated. "What kind of embarrassment?"

Richard said quietly, "James would be the first to admit that he's something of a philanderer. If you haven't already grasped that fact, it must be because he has had the good sense to see that that sort of thing wouldn't do between him and you. However, I think I should warn you that going to his cabin, particularly in the rather scanty garment you were wearing this afternoon, could overset his good intentions."

"I see," said Ros. "Actually I had realised that Jaime ... that James was rather a flirt. But I wouldn't have thought he was likely to behave embarrassingly."

"No, I don't say he would. But one has to remember that he has a strong Spanish streak in him, and the Spaniards are hot-blooded and impulsive. They flare up more quickly than we do, not only when they quarrel but also, I should imagine, in their relationships with women."

As she lay in bed that night, watching the wavering silver reflections of the moonlit water on the ceiling, Ros wondered if Richard was right in his assessment of Jaime. He had known him far longer than she had, but her own impression was that Jaime's emotions might be a good deal less inflammable than Richard's. Jaime was a

relaxed man. Richard was cool and controlled, and control implied something held in check, something curbed.

A few days later, at lunch, Richard announced that they had all been invited to the Lockwoods' arrival party. He had been at the air-strip when their air-taxi from Barcelona had landed, and had been the first to be invited.

Ros dressed for the party in a mood of considerable anticipation, although why she should feel so buoyant she could not explain. Perhaps it was because the summer holidays were no longer a nagging worry at the back of her mind. Or perhaps it was because by now she had achieved a golden-brown tan which definitely did things for her, making her eyes seem more sparkling, her teeth whiter.

They went to the party on foot, and she could not but be aware of the two tall men on either side of her, both in white dinner jackets, both moderating their stride to match her shorter step. Only the most extreme Woman's Libite could fail to enjoy having such a personable pair of escorts, she thought.

"The Lockwoods' house is rather an eyesore," said Richard. "But it would have been even worse if my Spanish architect hadn't been able to restrain some of their wilder flights of fancy. Inside, it's a mind-boggling blend of the Alhambra palace at Granada and a modernised English pub. But don't be afraid to look aghast. They'll take it for granted you're dumbfounded with admiration."

At least ten other guests were converging on Casa Gwenfred when they arrived, and their hostess, clad in scarlet silk trousers, glittering with expensive fake jewels and crowned with a bouffant aureole of silver-blonde hair, had no time to say more than hello to them.

Waiters bearing trays of champagne glasses were circulating among the people in the gaudily tiled and paved courtyard which was the heart of the house.

"None of your cheap *champaña* for Gwen. Nothing but the best Cordoniu. Here's to her!" murmured Jaime, raising his glass in the direction of their hostess's strident laughter.

Ros felt an arm round her waist.

"Hello, hello, hello . . . who's the lovely creature you've brought with you?" enquired the owner of the arm.

It was Jaime who introduced them. "Ros, this is Freddy Lockwood. Ros is our new chef, Freddy."

"Very pleased to meet you, my love," said Freddy, giving her a squeeze.

He was half a head shorter than she was, very dapper, and bursting with bonhomie. Evidently he shared his wife's taste for plenty of jewellery, but all his ornaments were solid gold. Gold 'gypsy' rings on his stubby fingers. Gold and sapphire links in his shirt cuffs. A gold identity bracelet, and gold studs in the frilled front of his shirt.

He did not stay with them long before going off to greet some other people, and causing Richard to say, "I'm afraid he's always like that, and there isn't much one can do about it. He doesn't mean to be offensive. In his circle, women may like that sort of approach."

Before Ros could think of anything to say to this, a good-looking woman in green came across to Jaime, and said, "So you're back? How was Paris? Come and dance with me before it becomes impossibly crowded." And before he could attempt to introduce her she had led him away, apparently unaware that he had not been standing on his own.

"Would you like to dance, Rostangue?"

"Yes." She looked for somewhere to leave her glass.

Richard took it from her, and put it, with his, on a ledge in the blue and yellow tiling. Then he put his hand under her elbow and steered her to a large room leading off the courtyard where three or four couples were moving leisurely round the floor.

Hours later, when the party was over and she was lying in bed, reviewing it all, she wondered if it had been politeness merely which had prompted Richard to dance with her not once, but four or five times.

Always, when they had danced together, the music had been sweet and slow. She had never seen him on the floor during one of the more energetic up-to-date numbers; and indeed she could not imagine him gyrating to 'pop' with the uninhibited energy with which Jaime performed the livelier dances.

Jaime had danced with her only once. She had the impression he had danced with every woman there. Certainly the woman in green had not had a special share of his attention in spite of the somewhat possessive way in which she had greeted him at the beginning of the party.

It had been half past one in the morning when, at Richard's suggestion, the three of them had left the revels and strolled back to the yacht. After the heat of the day, and the smoky atmosphere in the enclosed parts of the house, the night had seemed cool. Ros had shivered, and wished she had brought a shawl with her, but the air had been close when they set out.

"Feeling chilly?" Jaime had stripped off his jacket and draped it round her.

"Thank you." The lining was warm from his shoulders. "But now you'll feel cold."

"No, because I'll jog ahead and make a nightcap. What would you like? Hot chocolate?"

"Yes, please."

When he had loped out of sight, Richard said, "I have to fly to London tomorrow. Is there anything I can bring back for you?"

"Nothing I can think of at the moment, thank you. Will you be away long?"

"Not more than two or three days. You won't mind being left among foreigners, will you?"

"Not in the least. Is James going to be away too?"

"He'll probably take off for the hills. It's what he usually does when he isn't needed here. What is the scent you're wearing?"

That he should ask so personal a question, even though his tone remained impersonal, made her glance at him in surprise.

"It's *Diorella.* Margot gave it to me. She'd bought a big bottle for herself, but it didn't suit her. It's difficult to tell about scents until you've worn them for a time. They don't smell the same on everyone."

"It smells very good on you."

Is that a compliment, or merely a statement of opinion? she wondered. Before she could decide whether or not to say 'Thank you', he went on, "Are you finding that you miss having another woman in the household, so to speak?"

"I miss Margot, as you miss anyone you've liked when they go away. I don't think it's necessarily preferable to be answerable to someone of one's own sex. There are good and bad employers, and their sex is irrelevant," she said candidly.

"You know, I presume, that I am no longer married."

"Yes."

He was silent for several yards. Then he said, "You're wise not to have married too young."

"That's what Margot said to me once. But it hasn't

been wisdom on my part. I've never been seriously in love with anyone."

"Then if not wise, you have at least been lucky," he said sardonically. "Love is a condition which can have extremely unpleasant after-effects if it strikes people before they've learned judgment."

"Don't you believe in love any more?"

No sooner were the words uttered than she thought, I must have had too much *champaña.* We are not on such terms that I can ask him that sort of question. Now for the Snub Royal.

But Richard said only, "Yes, I believe in it. But I think it's like measles. One is unlikely to be badly afflicted more than once in a lifetime."

They had reached *Seabird* by that time, and as soon as she had finished the chocolate Jaime had made for her, Ros had said goodnight, and left the two men talking over brandies in the saloon.

Now, with the moonlight falling on the face of her bedside clock, and showing that it would soon be a quarter past two, she found herself wide awake, wondering whether it had been alcohol which had caused Richard to let his mask slip a little, and if, tomorrow, he would be unapproachable again.

Thirty-six hours later she was standing in the shade of a young almond tree, drinking ice-cold, delicious spring water from one of the two plastic cups which formed the cap of the vacuum flask Jaime had brought with him.

The spring gushed out from rocks in the grassy bank below the winding country road on which they were travelling to a village where he had an uncle and numerous cousins. Someone had wedged a piece of pipe among the rocks to make the water easier to catch, and had also pro-

vided a cheap glass tumbler for the use of thirsty wayfarers. Although hidden from the road, the spring was evidently well known to local people. When Jaime had stopped the car, there had been a racing cycle lying on the sandy verge, and they had found its owner filling his handlebar flasks.

"Water like this deserves crystal goblets," said Jaime, refilling his cup.

"Will this spring still be flowing in August? I've always thought of Spain as such an arid country."

"It is. There's a region south of Murcia which is desert. But the *fuente* here never dries up."

Having quenched his thirst, he cupped his palms beneath the sparkling cascade and laved his face with water. As he straightened, his brown skin glistening, he looked very Spanish.

As if he read her thoughts, he said, "Don't ever be fooled by that pseudo-Naval kit which Richard considers the proper rig for his yachtmaster. I may not have soil under my fingernails, but basically I'm a peasant – and proud of it."

The leisurely clop of a mule's hooves had been coming nearer on the roadway above them. Now a hoarse voice hailed them, and they looked up to see a wrinkled old man in a wide-brimmed straw hat peering down at them.

Jaime bade him good day, and the old man said something to him in Catalan before disappearing from view.

"Country people of his generation don't mince matters. He says that if he were a young man, and had a girl like you with him, he would not insult her by making conversation," Jaime interpreted. "He's right. I'm wasting my opportunities."

As he stepped towards her, she fended him off with the flat of her hands. "No, Jaime."

"No?" With his hands on her waist, he paused. "Perhaps you're right. One kiss leads to another, and we have a fair way to go yet. Perhaps later on . . ." His hazel eyes glinted teasingly.

"Not later on either," she said, smiling, but with underlying firmness.

The village of Valdejuan was perched on one of the foothills of the range of mountains which Jaime said was the Sierra de Miranda. It was about three o'clock when they drove up a steep, narrow street leading to a small *plaza* with a church on one side and a bar on the other.

Jaime parked the car in the *plaza*, and they walked up an even steeper and narrower street. All the windows were shuttered. There was nobody about. It might have been a ghost town but for the pot plants on the balconies, and the presence of several small, timid cats.

Many of the houses had large, stable-type doors, and it was one of these doors which Jaime pushed open, causing the mule within to give a startled snort. He said something soothing to the animal and led the way up a flight of stairs, announcing his arrival on the way.

Within moments a woman in a print overall appeared at the top of the flight. She was clearly delighted to see him, and they kissed each other on both cheeks. Then Jaime introduced Ros, who was also kissed on both cheeks before being ushered into a room furnished with a large table in the centre, many upright and two fireside chairs, ranged round the walls, a television set surmounted by a snarling stuffed animal, and a knitting machine.

In no time at all the other members of the family were welcoming Jaime, and kissing or shaking hands with Ros, according to their age and sex. Before long, neighbours were crowding in.

Soon, a cloth was spread over the table, and bottles of

wine, bowls of olives, and a large platter of slices of home-cured ham were set out. Then Tia Ana clasped a large, round loaf to her bosom and began to cut off thick slices which were handed round until everyone had one.

It was growing dusk when they left, and the village, which earlier had seemed deserted, had come to life. The tables outside the bar were full of elderly men, and the younger men of the *pueblo* were returning by tractor and mule cart from their day's work. The mules, Ros noticed, wore leather boots over their hooves, presumably to give them a better grip on the steep streets.

"Are you exhausted?" asked Jaime when, after many delays while he stopped to speak to people who knew him, they reached the car.

"No, rather surprisingly, I'm not. I expected that trying to understand them, and trying not to be completely mute myself, would be a strain. But it wasn't nearly as much effort as I imagined. What convivial people they are! The ham was delicious, wasn't it? I'm so glad you asked me to come with you. I feel that today I've at last begun to know Spain."

"You weren't repelled by the smell of mule wafting up the stairs from the stable?" he asked quizzically.

"Not in the least. I noticed it," she conceded. "But I daresay one doesn't, once one is used to it. I can think of a great many worse smells."

"Did you realise that the stairs went on up to another door which opens on to the street above the one we walked up?"

"Yes, one of the children showed it to me. Jaime, I've been meaning to ask you, who was the old man who came to see you off in Paris, and who was so upset when you left?"

"That was Paco, one of my great-uncles. He had to get

out of Spain quickly during the war, and he's been in exile ever since. He longs to come back to this country, but he's afraid of being arrested and imprisoned. I've tried to convince him that the revolution was a long time ago, and no one would harm him if he came back. But he's old, and he doesn't understand how much Spain has changed in this decade."

They had dinner in a restaurant in Tortosa, a prosperous town on the bank of the broad river Ebro. The place was full of Spanish people. Ros was the only foreigner there.

She wanted to try something typically Spanish, and Jaime ordered *boquerones*, fried tails-together like fans, and then grilled rabbit with *alioli*. The rabbit was slightly off-putting as it had been skinned and split down the middle without its head being removed. But it tasted good, and the *alioli*, a garlic sauce of olive oil, lemon juice and egg yolks, was delicious spread on hot toast.

It was midnight when they returned to Laguna Blau. Instead of taking the road to the yacht basin, Jaime drove to the promenade behind the beach. There he stopped the car.

"Shall we stretch our legs for ten minutes?"

Ros hesitated, wondering if it would be wiser to say she was tired. But the moonlit sea was too inviting to be resisted.

All the time they were walking on the sand by the water's edge, he made no attempt to touch her. It was not until they returned to the car that he drew her into his arms.

As she had that morning by the *fuente*, she held him off while she said, "Jaime, don't be offended, but I'd much rather you didn't kiss me. It's hardly ever a good thing to become even mildly involved with people one works

with. Couldn't we keep it uncomplicated?"

He had his back to the moon, but she saw a smile crease his cheeks. "I don't think one goodnight kiss would cause complications."

"I do."

As he bent towards her, she turned her face aside.

He let her go. "Could it be that you're already involved?"

Ros shook her head. "I suppose you think I'm being stuffy?"

"No. As it says in the Code of Love – 'Too easy a victory robs love of its charm: opposition makes it more desirable'."

Later, while she was undressing, Ros wondered if he had taken her rebuff good-temperedly because his impulse to kiss her had not been a strong one. Perhaps he had only been doing what he felt was expected of him. Certainly there had been no sign of the hot blood which Richard had warned her about.

The following morning, Jaime gave Ros her first sailing lesson in a dinghy belonging to the Club Blau.

"Tonight I'll do the cooking. We'll have a *paella*," he said, while they were eating a bread-and-*chorizo* lunch on a beach some way north of Laguna Blau.

"Richard told me you could cook. Where did you learn?"

He cut off another chunk of sausage, peeled away the tough, papery skin, and offered it to her on the point of his clasp-knife.

"I could never stand the school food, and *when* I reached the Fifth Form and shared a study with two other boys, I invested in a camping stove and taught myself to cook some decent meals. I was friendly with an old man

who had been a great poacher in his time, and he taught me how to snare rabbits. You can do great things with a rabbit and some onions and herbs."

As he had himself raised the subject, she felt encouraged to ask, "How did you come to go to an English school if your father died in the war before you were born?"

"After both wars were over – the Spanish war and World War Two – my father's parents got in touch with my mother, and offered to give me an English education. My mother thought it was what my father would have wished, and times were very tough in Spain then, so she accepted their offer."

"But surely just after the war you weren't old enough to go to a boarding school?"

"It was 1947. I was eight. I had a year's private coaching to give me some English, and then I was sent to a prep school."

"And came back to Spain for the holidays?"

"No," he said casually. "No, that was part of the deal. My grandparents felt that if I kept coming back to Spain, I'd make less effort to adapt."

"But you can come back sometimes, surely?"

"Yes . . . sometimes. More coffee?"

"Thank you." She held out her beaker.

He said, "Tell me more about your nephew. Is he clever or average, or are games his forte?" It was plain that he did not wish to pursue the subject of his own boyhood.

Later, when she was watching him prepare the *paella* which he said took its name from the wide, shallow *paellera* in which it was cooked, Ros remarked, "We don't exactly slave for our livelihood, do we?"

"It isn't always as leisurely as it has been lately," Jaime

answered. "When Richard comes back tomorrow he may step up the pace till you're dizzy. These slack spells never last long."

This proved to be an accurate forecast which Ros remembered with a rueful inward grin when, with *Seabird* heading for Corsica, Richard gave her the progamme of entertainments, including a buffet luncheon for fifty people which he wished to give during their stay there.

She did go ashore in Corsica, but only to shop for foodstuffs in Ajaccio, the capital. From Corsica they went to Sardinia, and from there back to Spain via Mallorca.

At Mallorca they anchored in a cove on the mountainous side of the island, away from the crowded tourist resorts, so that Richard could spend a day water-skiing. All morning the powerboat, steered by Ramon, zoomed back and forth over the still blue sea with Richard planing along behind it, or sweeping in an expert arc across the small waves made by the boat's spreading wake.

In the afternoon Jaime took the wheel, and Ros sat in the stern, while Richard practised difficult techniques which sometimes ended with him losing his balance and subsiding in a flurry of foam.

"Would you like to try it?" he asked Ros, when they picked him up after one of these spills.

"Yes, please."

She proved to have a natural aptitude for the sport. After only a few attempts she mastered the trick of launching herself. It was wonderfully exhilarating to skim over the sunlit water on white wings of spray with her hair streaming out behind her like a pennant.

"Well done," said Richard, when they came to pick her up at the end of a run.

As he reached down to help her scramble aboard, there

was a look in his eyes which she had not seen before. Clearly, by her prowess on the skis she had at last won his admiration.

More than once, during the rest of that day, she sensed his eyes on her and, turning her head, found him watching her with a new kind of interest in his expression. It excited and also rather alarmed her. She had resented his indifference, but now she was inclined to wish that nothing had changed and that he was still quite uninterested in her in any personal sense.

In bed that night she was restless, unable to sleep. Because of the air-conditioning the ports were always kept closed, and suddenly she longed to see the stars without the intervening pane of glass. The sealed ports and the silence of the sleeping vessel made the cabin seem like a cocoon from which she must escape or stifle.

Shrugging on her cotton wrapper, but not bothering with slippers, she let herself stealthily out of the cabin, and made their way silently on deck. The fresh air was fifteen degrees warmer than the artificial coolness below, but she gave a sigh of relief at being in the open, with the sea washing softly against the hull, and the yacht's brasses gleaming in the moonlight.

She was gazing at the mysterious silhouette of the island when a low voice asked, "Couldn't you sleep?" She turned, with a gasp, to see Jaime leaning over the rails of the top deck.

"Oh, how you startled me!" she exclaimed.

"Sorry. It wasn't intentional." He straddled the railing and dropped lightly down to her level. "D'you fancy a swim? I was thinking of having one."

"I'd love to . . . but is it allowed?" she added uncertainly.

"Why not?" He began to unbutton his shirt.

"I'll have to get a bathing suit," she whispered.

"Swim in your skin. I won't look," he said, with a grin.

She smiled and shook her head. "I won't be two minutes."

When she returned, he was already floating near the foot of the gangway ladder.

"How lovely *Seabird* looks by moonlight," murmured Ros when, some minutes later, they were both gently treading water a hundred yards from where the white yacht lay at anchor.

"Yes, I wish she were mine," Jaime agreed.

They swam for about half an hour, and Ros would have stayed in longer had Jaime not climbed aboard, his dark skin glistening as he pulled himself on to the ladder and turned to give her a helping hand. However, foolish as it might be, she did not care to remain in the sea at night without him, and therefore she did not object to having her midnight dip brought to an end somewhat sooner than she would have wished.

"I'm hungry," said Jaime, holding a terry robe for her to slip her arms through the sleeves.

The fleecy white robes were one of the luxuries of life aboard *Seabird*. There was a special locker in which a dozen of them were kept to envelop returning bathers.

"Would some *paté* and salad fill the gap?" asked Ros, as she tied her sash.

"Admirably." He handed her a towel. "I'd forgotten about your long hair. How will you dry it?"

"With my portable dryer. It doesn't take more than ten minutes." She wound the towel into a turban, and they went below to the galley.

"Valerie was afraid of the water. She couldn't swim," Jaime remarked, while they were eating.

"Valerie? Oh . . . Richard's wife. What made you think of her?"

He shrugged. "I don't know."

"Did you like her?"

"I hardly knew her. They were already breaking up when I started to work for him. This is excellent *paté*."

Ros watched him spread it thickly on Bath Oliver biscuits sent from England. She ate only a piece of cheese and a handful of grapes.

"Are we staying here tomorrow?" she enquired.

"No, playtime is over. First thing tomorrow we head for Laguna Blau."

"In that case, shoudn't you be resting while you have the chance?"

"To misquote A. E. Housman, there'll be time enough for sleep in the grave."

The coffee having percolated, Ros filled two cups and handed one of them to him.

"Which reminds me of another poem," he went on. " 'The grave's a fine and private place, but none, I think, do there embrace'." And he put his arm round her waist and drew her against him to kiss her.

Since his grasp was only a loose one, it was not difficult for her to draw back with a protesting, "Please don't, Jaime."

But although she had succeeded in dissuading him on the two previous occasions when he had attempted an embrace, tonight he was in a different mood. This time her reluctance kindled a glint of determination in his eyes, and he pulled her to him more firmly.

But as he bent his head, a voice from behind them said icily, "Rostangue asked you to release her."

Ros jumped. Jaime had steadier nerves. He dropped one arm to turn and face his employer, but his other arm

remained round her. He looked faintly amused.

The expression on Richard's face was one of cold contempt. But whether his censure was directed at Jaime alone, or whether he held them equally culpable, Ros could not tell.

Richard opened the door, and said pointedly, "Goodnight, Rostangue."

She hesitated, unwilling to leave Jaime to face Richard's displeasure, but not knowing what she could say to smooth the situation.

"Off you go. 'Night, Ros." Jaime gave her a gentle nudge from behind.

When she turned a troubled glance on him, he gave her such a naughty wink that she lost her concern and felt he thoroughly deserved whatever tongue-lashing Richard had in store for him.

There was no softening of Richard's expression as she looked at him on her way out, and said a low-voiced, "Goodnight."

"Goodnight," he replied, but his eyes were unrelentingly hard. He blamed her as well, she realised.

As she went to her cabin, wishing she had never left it, she realised another thing. Tomorrow was the last day of her probationary period. In the morning, it was within Richard's powers to tell her he did not wish her to remain in his employment. And if he dismissed her, she would not be the only one to suffer. Christopher, too, would be upset.

CHAPTER FOUR

As she plugged in her hand dryer, Ros wished very much that she could hear what the two men were saying to each other in the galley.

Presently, drying her hair, she began to see the incident in a calmer light, and to feel that Richard's intervention – or at least the manner of it – had been somewhat absurd. Surely a discreet cough and a raised eyebrow would have been enough to quash Jaime? But Richard had sent her away with all the implied severity of a co-ed schoolmaster who had caught two senior pupils canoodling after Lights Out.

Jaime was not present at breakfast the following morning and Ros waited apprehensively for Richard to begin upbraiding her. But he made no reference to what had occurred in the small hours, and his manner was not unduly frosty. He was normally rather taciturn at beakfast.

The day before the two boys were due to arrive in Spain, *Seabird* cruised north to Barcelona. Although the English schools had not yet broken up for the summer, French children were aleady on holiday, and all along the Costa Dorada the resorts were full of French and German sunseekers.

"What on earth will it be like when the main flow of English tourists arrives?" murmured Ros, when they had passed half a dozen beaches, all equally crowded with recumbent bodies.

"Like an anthill," Richard answered sardonically. They were leaning on the port rails where she had been

standing by herself until he came by and joined her.

As he spoke, he turned his back on the coast with its backdrop of heat-hazed brown hills, and looked sideways down at her face. "Would you care to try one of Barcelona's restaurants this evening?"

"Yes, very much."

"We'll go ashore about nine." Richard continued on his way.

Now what exactly does he mean? she pondered, after he had left her. Is Jaime to be included? Or is this a sort of Cook's Night Out? Or could it be a dinner *à deux*?

She found out the answer to the first question when, coming back from a shopping expedition at about half past seven, she encountered Jaime going ashore.

"Shopping spree?" he asked, eyeing her parcels.

"A mild one," she admitted. "The shops here are terribly tempting, especially the shoe shops. In England so many shoes are made of synthetic materials now, even the quite expensive ones. Here, they're still mainly leather."

"Yes, but for how much longer, I wonder? The way things are going in the world, leather and wool and cotton will soon be luxuries for the few. I hear you're going out tonight."

"Yes . . . aren't you coming, too?"

"You must be joking," he said. "See you tomorrow. Enjoy yourself."

She watched him walking away, and wondered where he was going, and if he had a girl in Barcelona, perhaps a selection of girls. The thought was oddly distasteful to her.

As Richard's car was at Laguna Blau, they took a taxi to the restaurant. Ros wore the dress she had bought earlier; a dress of aquamarine crêpe with an echo of the

'Twenties in its fluid lines. Her shoes matched the delicate colour, and there was a soft leather clutch-purse to go with them.

"I thought you would like to go somewhere typically Spanish. James assures me that this place has the best Catalan food in the city," Richard told her, as they arrived and he helped her to step out of the taxi.

Presently, when they were seated at a corner table, sipping *aperitivos* and studying menus, he surprised her by closing the red leather folder, and saying, "You are probably a better judge of all this than I am. I'll let you choose for me."

"This is very unselfish of you," she said, when the waiter had left them.

Richard raised an interrogative eyebrow. "Unselfish?"

"Coming here is a great treat for me, but I think you would really prefer an international restaurant."

"Perhaps I'm too conservative in my taste. However, if I don't enjoy the food, I shall still have the pleasure of looking at you."

If Jaime had said that to her, she would have smiled and said, "Thank you", in acknowledgment of a compliment which, although not completely meaningless, had no great significance.

With Richard also she smiled and murmured her thanks, but inwardly she was disturbed. What was the motive behind the change in his attitude? If he was beginning to be attracted to her, where might it end? To become emotionally involved with one's employer was a situation fraught with pitfalls; and now she had not only herself to consider. Anything which happened to her affected Christopher as well.

"My dear girl, don't look so alarmed," Richard said dryly. "It is not my style to start nudging your knee under

the table."

"I didn't . . . I wasn't –" she began.

"I have learnt to read your expressions rather better since the first time we dined together in Paris. Do you hear from Margot MacLaren at all?"

"Yes – yes, I've had two letters from her." Thankfully Ros seized the safely impersonal subject of her correspondence with Margot. "It's extraordinary that she finds the time."

"I should imagine writing a letter is as little trouble to her as poaching an egg is to you."

Whether he really enjoyed the meal, or only pretended to do so, she could not be certain. To her, every mouthful of the fish soup, followed by a capon stuffed with prunes, pork and peaches and seasoned with cinnamon and pine nuts, was delicious.

While they ate, they discussed the boys. Richard encouraged her to explain in greater detail the family circumstances which had made her the only person willing to take charge of her nephew.

"I should have thought your married brother and his wife would have taken the boy under their wing," he remarked, when she had told him about Andrew and William.

"I think Andrew would have done so, but my sister-in-law wasn't keen, and naturally her feelings are his first consideration. I understand her point of view. She's a person who likes to plan everything, and her present plan is to have four babies in seven years. I suppose if one wants a large family, it's not a bad idea to produce them as rapidly as possible. But when her third child arrives next Christmas, the others will be four years old and two. She'll have as much as she can handle. A cuckoo in the nest is out of the question."

"She could have altered her plans. You had to," he said. "You were hoping to go to America, I believe?"

"Yes, but I'm having a very good time in Spain. I don't feel I have any grounds for complaint." She paused.

"There's one thing which has always puzzled me. Why –?" Again she hesitated, wondering if the question might be better left unasked.

"Why what?" Richard prompted.

"That night in Paris when we walked back to Margot's flat – Why did you suddenly offer to double the salary she was paying me?"

The waiter was refilling their wine glasses, and even when he moved away Richard did not immediately answer her question. It was only after several minutes' thought that at last he said, "At that time, if you remember, you had given me the impression there was a man in England who was more important to you than your work. I suppose I wanted to see how you would react, given a sufficiently strong counter-attraction."

This time Ros had no hesitation in speaking her mind. "I call that detestable!" she told him, in low-voiced indignation. "Deliberately to . . . to try and break up a love affair. How could you be so callous?"

He said nothing, and after a moment, she went on, "It isn't like you. You've been so kind about asking Christopher to spend the summer here."

He shrugged. "Only because it suits my purpose. I have never been a kind man, Rostangue."

"I daresay most businessmen aren't. It seems to be a cut-throat world from what I've read about mergers and take-overs and so on. But even if you have to be fairly ruthless in your business dealings, surely it needn't extend to your private life?"

"It's my private life which has given me a harsh view

of human nature," he answered sardonically. "Perhaps you will judge me less hardly if I tell you that, whatever defects of character I possess, I've formed the opinion that, had you been committed to someone, nothing I offered would have tempted you."

"I certainly hope not," she replied. "Now what I don't understand is how, thinking the worst of me, you still wanted me on your staff."

"One hires a chef for his or her culinary skill, not for moral superiority. At that time your character, except in so far as it affected your usefulness, was a matter of indifference to me."

"You are very blunt always."

"It's a trait we share. Not everyone I employ would tell me I had behaved detestably."

He was smiling faintly as he spoke, but her tone was serious as she said, "I still think it was a wrong use of the power which your money gives you."

"I agree with you. But there are not many people who don't behave badly from time to time, and at least I have confessed my fall from grace. I could have told you, for example, that something about you intrigued me so much that I had to get to know you better, regardless of what it cost me."

"Yes, that would have been far more believable!" she said ironically.

"There is a grain of truth in it. You did interest me the first time I saw you."

"The first time you saw me you were with Ellen Booth."

"So? I realise from your tone that you mean something by that statement, but the significance escapes me."

"Miss Booth is one of the most ravishing girls I've ever seen."

"And very willing to be ravished," Richard commented cynically. "I expect you think that unchivalrous of me, but if you had asked Margot her opinion of Ellen, she would have said much the same thing."

"Margot gave me her opinion without being asked: it was that Miss Booth was hoping to become your second wife," she told him frankly.

He gave a satiric laugh. "An aim unlikely to be realised by first becoming my mistress." He sensed the doubt in her mind, and added, "No, she didn't become that either, as a matter of fact."

"It's none of my business anyway," Ros said, rather stiffly.

Richard drank some wine, watching her over the rim of the glass. "Don't be foolish," he said quietly, as he replaced it on the table.

Just then the waiter returned to ask if they wished for a *postre* to conclude their meal.

Ros did not really wish for a pudding, but if she refused in favour of coffee the man would go away, and she wanted to delay him to give herself time to think about Richard's last remark and how she should react to it.

After studying the menu for far longer than was necessary, she chose *mingolillos*, having no idea what they were until they arrived and proved to be nut fritters with honey poured over them. Richard had a pear for his dessert. To her relief, he did not resume the conversation which the waiter had interrupted.

"Shall we walk part of the way?" he suggested, as they left the restaurant.

The streets were still full of life, and presently they stopped for a drink at a table outside a small café. But for the rest of the evening, although he sometimes placed

the flat of his hand against her back to guide her across a street, both his manner and his conversation were comfortably impersonal.

When they returned to *Seabird*, he did not suggest a nightcap but merely thanked her for her company and bade her goodnight.

For a long time after she was in bed, Ros lay thinking over the evening, and pondering certain moments in particular.

At that time your character was a matter of indifference to me . . . You did interest me the first time I saw you . . . Don't be foolish.

Had he meant by that last remark that she *was* entitled to know the extent of his relationship with Ellen? What other construction could one put on it?

It was Richard, not the arrival of the boys, who was first in her thoughts when she got up the following morning.

An aim unlikely to be realised by first becoming my mistress, he had said of Ellen's hope of a marriage between them.

Last night Ros had taken that to mean he valued chastity in women, at least in any woman he might consider marrying. This morning it struck her suddenly that the remark could have had a very different meaning; it could have been a warning that he did not intend to marry again, and any woman who entered on an affair with him would do so at her own risk.

"Oh dear, I don't know *what* to think about him," she murmured aloud, as she brushed her hair.

She went with him to meet the boys' scheduled flight. In the taxi on the way to the airport, she stole a look at his profile and had her glance intercepted by a smile

which suddenly made the back of the taxi seem a much more confined space than it had a few seconds earlier.

"I hope you like my son," he said.

"I hope you like my nephew," she responded, with a flutter in her throat.

"Perhaps the most important thing is that they should like each other."

That the two boys did like each other was clear almost from the outset.

"Good God! When did you last wash?" demanded Richard, hastily releasing his grip on Robert Livingstone's grey and – as Ross was soon to discover – sticky paw. Without waiting for a reply, Richard turned to her. "Rostangue, this is my son Robert. But take my advice – don't shake hands with him!"

It was the sort of sarcastic banter which would have made Christopher redden with embarrassment. But Rob had inherited some of his father's assurance.

When Ross said a smiling "Hello", and disregarded Richard's warning, he responded with an unabashed grin.

Christopher's hands were only a degree less filthy, and both boys had the end-of-term grubbiness and untidiness of the majority of boarding-school boys of their age group.

Ros was unconcerned by their scruffiness. But she noticed that Rob's pleasant face was marred by an outcrop of spots which she thought were not incipient acne but the result of an inadequate diet. Recently the school had introduced the cafeteria system, and although she knew the food provided for the boys was not bad by school catering standards, she doubted if the younger boys took proper helpings of vegetables now that they could choose what to eat and were not closely supervised by adults.

Lashings of salads for you, my lads, she thought, on the way back to the *Seabird*, with Richard in the front with the

driver, and the two boys squeezed beside her. And if Rob was like Christopher and hated eggs, she would, with the aid of the liquidiser, disguise them in banana milk shakes.

When Christopher saw the size of *Seabird*, his eyes popped.

"Come on: I'll show you over her," Rob said eagerly.

They disappeared below, leaving Richard to say to Ros, "I don't think we need worry about them getting on well. They'll have the occasional scrap, no doubt, but they certainly aren't a case of chalk and cheese."

"No, thank goodness," she agreed, greatly relieved. For had the boys not liked each other, it would have been incumbent on her to make alternative arrangements for her nephew.

Later in the afternoon, when the shops re-opened about four, it was necessary to buy the boys some clothes and shoes. Christopher had nothing suitable for the heat of Spain in July, and Rob had outgrown all his holiday clothes.

It was already dark when they left Barcelona, and the twinkling lights of the towns along the coast were unexpectedly beautiful. Ros leaned on the starboard rail and presently, as he had done the day before, Richard joined her.

"The boys are in the wheelhouse with James. If I have to fly to London next week – and it may be unavoidable, unfortunately – you can rely on him to stop them becoming too obstreperous." He paused. "And you needn't worry about James overstepping the mark again."

"He never has, Richard – not really. He's flirted a little, that's all. I can cope with him."

"You seemed to be having some difficulty in the galley the other night."

"He was only fooling about. It was my own fault for

swimming at that hour. But it was such a perfect night and I couldn't sleep."

"I couldn't sleep either," he said. "I was also intending to swim, but passing the galley I heard voices, and –"

The boys came rushing along the deck. "There aren't any crisps on board, are there, Miss Slade?"

"You can't be hungry again already," Richard said to his son. "It's barely an hour since you ate that colossal supper."

Ros saw that the boy was puzzled by his father's curtness, and said hurriedly, "I haven't any crisps, I'm afraid, but I expect I can find something to fill the gaps. Come down to the galley."

In the week before he had to go away, Richard devoted all his time to entertaining the children. Christopher quickly learnt to water-ski, and the boys spent so much of their time either on, in, or under the sea that by evening their fingers and toes would be as crinkled as the hands of a washerwoman.

"You can't say they aren't clean now, Dad," said Rob, displaying spotless fingers before supper, on the night before his father's departure.

The sea had not only cleaned him thoroughly, it had cleared up the worst of his spots; and both boys were beginning to tan.

"Now listen, my lads," said Richard firmly, "what with late nights and iced beers and visits to the bowling alley, you've had a pretty good debauch since you arrived. While I'm away I want you to stick to Coke and to be in bed by ten-thirty. If James reports any tomfoolery, you won't have the treat I'm planning for when I come back."

To Ros, later on, he said, "Have you any commissions for me this time?"

She shook her head. "What is this treat you're planning for them?"

"I don't know yet. I said that to encourage them to behave. I'll think of something before I get back."

Ros thought it unlikely that the boys would play the fool with Jaime in charge. His authority was less overt than Richard's, but it was there, underlying his easy-going manner like the sinews beneath his brown skin. She would be very surprised if the boys were so unwise as to test his power to control them.

The next day Jaime suggested an expedition to see the lower reaches of the Ebro, and the rice-growing area at its mouth.

"It will give you some time to yourself. Borrow from my books if you want to," he said to Ros, after asking her to pack a picnic lunch for them.

"Can't I come with you? Would a female be an encumbrance?"

"You can come if you wish. I thought you'd prefer some peace and quiet."

Was it only her imagination, or was there a hint of reluctance in his manner?

Ros had seen something of the Ebro before, on the occasion when Jaime had taken her to see his relations in Valdejuan, and on the way back they had dined in Tortosa, and later they had walked on the beach and, for the second time that day, he had attempted to kiss her.

Today, their first sight of the river was from the small town of Amposta where there was a narrow suspension bridge slung between two massive stone archways. Standing on this bridge they could look downstream and see the magnificent span of the new four-lane bridge built to carry the *autopista* across the swirling currents of the river.

When they had been to a nearby shop selling fishing tackle, they had a break in a café. The boys asked for ices, Ros had a glass of white wine, and Jaime ordered a *carajillo*, which was black coffee laced with brandy. Afterwards, by various lanes and byways, they re-crossed the main coastal road on their way to the flatness of the delta.

"These small farms we're passing are either *granjas* or *fincas*," Jaime explained to the boys as he drove along a dusty lane between orange groves and fields of vegetables. "A *granja* has livestock. A *finca* doesn't. I have a *finca* between the main road and the hills, and mine is nearly all olive trees. We'll have lunch there. It's cool in the barn. This is a *noria*" – as he brought the car to a halt near where a slow, blinkered horse was endlessly trudging round a well, pulling the shaft which operated a great water-wheel on which were fixed large, rusty tins.

"Before tins came into use, they used earthenware jars to scoop the water from the well, and very much nicer they must have looked," he said.

Fom this fertile hinterland where, in spite of the increasing heat, men and women in broad-brimmed straw hats toiled over their crops, they passed to the equally fertile but monotonous green expanse of the rice fields. The delta village which they visited had a vaguely North African atmosphere with its single-storey white houses, palm-lined streets, and glimpses of purple and scarlet flowers growing in pots in courtyards or spilling over dazzlingly white walls.

Although she listened attentively to eveything Jaime told them, the heat by noon was so great that Ros was relieved when it was time to go to his *finca* for a rest in the shade.

The approach to the place was unpromising. From the torrent of high season traffic on the main coast road, they turned up a lane by a brickworks where a chained dog snarled as they passed. Then they had to slow down to a crawl because of the state of the track. Without a cool current of air blowing through the open windows, the car was like a sauna. Ros blotted her temples with a tissue, and felt a slow trickle of moisture sliding down between her shoulder-blades. She began to wish she had stayed behind. Cushioned by the luxury of *Seabird* and Laguna Blau, she had not realised fully how searingly hot it must be for people without swimming pools and air-conditioning.

The sight of a long concrete pig-house, and a whiff in passing of its occupants, did not encourage her hopes of a relaxing lunch break. A little further on Jaime turned the car up a slope and they jolted to a halt in front of the weathered double doors of an ancient barn. Switching off the engine, and producing from his pocket an eight-inch key, he swung himself out of the driving seat and went to unlock his property.

In the dark interior of the building it was a blessed ten degrees cooler. And even when Jaime pushed open some shutters, revealing an unglazed but iron-barred window, the light remained comfortably dim compared with the merciless glare outside.

"Are you feeling the heat?" he asked Ros.

"Yes, I am a bit."

"Sit down. I'll get you a drink."

He pulled a plastic cover off a deck chair and set it up for her. Then he went to a cupboard in the corner of the barn, and she heard the rattle of a chain and the clank of a bucket. A few moments later, in a beaker from the picnic basket, he gave her some water which was almost as coldly delicious as the water from the roadside *fuente* on

the day they went to Valdejaun.

"It's from the *cisterna* beneath the barn," he explained, when she had emptied the beaker in two long thirsty draughts.

"Lovely . . . thank you." Ros leaned back and closed her eyes. "How those people can work in the fields . . ." She left the sentence unfinished.

He refilled the beaker for her, and this time she drank it more slowly, savouring its coldness. "Where are the boys?"

"The're exploring the place. I'm afraid if you want to spend a penny you'll have to go behind a tree. But with seven acres of them to choose from, you'll have plenty of privacy."

The thud of running feet heralded the return of the boys. They burst into the barn in great excitement.

"We just saw a hell of a big snake, James," Rob announced breathlessly. "It was pale grey with black zig-zag markings. We tried to catch it, but it shot under a pile of rocks."

"It was the biggest snake I've ever seen. It –" Christopher's voice tailed off, and his face took on a puzzled expression.

Quickly turning her head, Ros was just in time to see Jaime frowning at them.

"What's up? What's the matter?" asked Rob.

Jaime, realising that Ros had seen his signal to the boys, gave a shrug of mingled annoyance and amusement.

"Let me give you a spot of advice, *chicos*. It has to do with girls and women, and you can take it from me that knowing how to handle females is one hundred per cent more useful than knowing how to do quadratics, and all the other things they try to teach you at school."

He paused, and the boys waited, mystified, for what-

ever was coming next.

"When you're out with a girl in the country," Jaime continued, "never ever mention a snake to her." He turned to Ros. "I don't suppose I'll convince you, but in fact it's exceedingly rare to see a snake around here and, believe me, they are far more scared of you than you are of them. The fellow the boys have just seen is probably a couple of kilometres away by this time."

"But snakes don't –" Rob stopped short as Jaime directed another basilisk glare at him.

"I think what Rob was going to say is that snakes are not great travellers. They tend to frequent one small area," said Ros, with a smile in her eyes. "But I agree with you; when I go for my stroll among the olives, I'm most unlikely to be attacked by one."

A responsive twinkle kindled in the hazel eyes looking down at her. Jaime's mouth twitched with silent laughter.

"A woman in a thousand," he said appreciatively.

And then, abruptly, the warmth in his eyes was extinguished, and the humorous curve left his mouth. "Time for lunch, boys," he said briskly. "Help me unpack it, will you? Ros is off duty today."

After lunch, the four of them walked round the boundary of the *finca.* In places, old dry-stone walls marked the limits of Jaime's property, but in others the only boundary was a line of sight between marker stones. As well as the many olive trees, with their contorted trunks and silvery foliage, there were fig and apricot trees, and large *algarrobas* bearing a coarse black bean.

"These beans are grown for fodder, but when I was small children ate them," said Jaime, breaking a carob and offering the halves to the boys.

"Ugh! It's foul," exclaimed Rob, spitting it out.

"When you're hungry, anything tastes good."

"What's this, James?" Christopher had found a bulbous glass bottle wedged in the fork of a tree.

"It's an old-fashioned fly trap. How about giving your aunt a helping hand over this wall?"

Christopher sprang on the wall, reached down both hands and gave Ros a vigorous hoist. Then he and Ros ran on ahead, leaving her with the disquieting suspicion that Jamie had not been mending her nephew's manners so much as avoiding the necessity to help her himself.

The sight of a spectacular black and white bird with a ginger-brown head and crest distracted her.

"A hoopoe," said Jaime, before she could ask him what it was. "Catalans call it a 'puput'."

A few months later, from a distance, they heard the muted 'puput' call of another bird.

"Did you inherit this land, Jaime?"

"No, I bought it a couple of years ago, before land prices had begun to soar. Thirty years hence I may have to swallow the anchor and this will be somewhere to live. It's not at its best at the moment. The ground is hard, and the grass is scorched. In the spring the whole *finca* is ankle-deep in white flowers."

"It must look lovely. Where will you live? In the barn?"

"I daresay it could be converted, but I'll probably build a small chalet. Anyway, that's far in the future. With luck, it will never be necessary. I shall die with a deck under my feet, and a *carajillo* in my hand."

The boys returned, delighted at finding a ball of dried fur and small bones regurgitated by an owl. Before they had finished discussing it, a flock of sheep and half a dozen dark brown goats came into view.

While Jaime chatted to the shepherd, and the boys made a fuss of the sheepdog, Ros stood in the shade

watching Jaime and wondering why his attitude to her had changed so radically.

The only explanation was that Richard had warned him off. But Jaime had once told her that he was his own man, and would defer to Richard's opinions only in connection with his job, and not even then in matters of seamanship. Ros would have sworn that, if he felt like flirting with her, he would continue to do so, regardless of anyone's disapproval. She was disappointed in him, and she was annoyed with Richard for his officiousness in intervening.

The heat was beginning to abate when they left the *finca*. The boys would have liked to stay there longer, but Jaime said that as the air cooled the mosquitoes would start biting.

"I can't keep passing through San Carlos without paying a call on my mother's relations. Someone in the town is sure to see me and report it to Maria and Paco, and if I haven't been near them, their feelings will be hurt. We needn't stay long," he said, as they entered the small fishing port which lay on their homeward route.

His maternal relations lived in a second floor apartment, and they had one visitor already: a small, black-haired, fiery-eyed woman who sprang to her feet with loud cries of joy and welcome.

"Ros, this is my cousin Angelita," said Jaime, when he and the little dark person had hugged and kissed each other. And to Ros's surprise, Angelita said in excellent English, "How do you do, my dear. I'm delighted to meet you."

In the introductions which followed, Rob and Christopher submitted with sheepish grins to being kissed on both cheeks, not only by Angelita and Maria, but also by Maria's husband. The one person in the room whom they would have liked to be kissed by was Maria-José, a slim

pretty girl of thirteen. But she merely shook hands with them.

In spite of Jaime's assurance that the visit would be a brief one, in fact it was an hour and a half before his party left the house. With the warm Spanish hospitality which Ros had already experienced, Maria insisted on plying them with wine and *tapas*.

Much of the conversation was in Catalan, but from time to time Angelita would turn to the boys and say something to them in English. And before Jaime rose to leave, she said, "Tomorrow is a *fiesta*. Why don't we all have lunch in the country?"

"I'd like to, my dear," he answered. "But Robert's father is in England, and I'm in charge during his absence. I think these two lads might be bored."

Afterwards Ros was not sure what prompted her to say, "Oh, no – I think the boys would enjoy it. Certainly I would. It would be an interesting experience."

"Then it's settled," said Angelita decisively. "We will meet here at one, and I will telephone the Fuente de Sant-Pere and book a table for" – she counted quickly on her fingers – "ten of us."

"How is it that Angelita speaks English so well?" Ros asked Jaime, as they walked to the car.

"She lives in England. She went there to work and save, intending to come back to Spain as soon as she had bought two chalets, one to live in and one to let to summer visitors. Then she married an Englishman, and now she is stuck there until he retires in twenty years' time."

"She appears quite contented with her lot."

"I think she is," he agreed. "Harry is a nice enough chap. He'll be down here himself next week. Angelita has three weeks' holiday, but he can take only a fort-

night at a time."

"She still goes out to work?"

"Yes. Harry would rather she didn't, but they have no children, so the housework doesn't occupy her fully. And as I told you before, we spring from a long line of peasants. Angelita would be bored by too much leisure. She has no intellectual resources. It's one of the greatest social problems of our time. Most people have, or soon will have, more leisure than they know what to do with, and nothing is more degenerative than boredom."

"I agree with that up to a point. I'm sure thousands of people *are* bored by uninteresting jobs and aimless leisure. But is that necessarily worse than being perpetually exhausted by overwork as most people were a hundred years ago? A woman who works in a factory and spends her evenings playing bingo or watching television may not be getting the best out of life, but she's in heaven compared with the workers in Edwardian sweatshops. Did you know that it took a beader half an hour to decorate one evening shoe, and the maximum pay was ninepence – *for a dozen pairs*!"

They discussed the subject most of the way back to Laguna Blau. At supper Ros noticed that Rob seemed rather subdued. Once she caught him glowering at Jaime with an expression which she interpreted as one of sulky resentment.

Later, when Christopher came to her quarters to ask her to extract a splinter acquired at the *finca*, she said, "Rob seemed a bit morose at supper. Is he fed up about tomorrow?"

"No, it isn't that. While you were cooking supper, Jaime gave him a tremendous blast."

"What for?" she asked, astonished.

"You knew when you were ranting on about sweat-

shops on the way home –"

"I wouldn't have said I was ranting, precisely."

"Well, no, I suppose not *ranting* actually, but we had been listening to those Spanish people for ages, and then you and James started nattering, and Rob looked at me and made a yakkity-yak sign. James must have spotted it in the windscreen mirror. As soon as you'd gone to the galley, he told Rob off for impertinence, which wasn't very fair, because Rob didn't mean to be rude about you personally. He likes you. He was just fed up with listening to grown-ups for hours on end."

"There was nothing to prevent you boys from contributing your views on the subject." She put away her tweezers and dabbed his hand with antiseptic lotion.

"Thanks very much." He kissed her. "*Buenas noches.*"

She answered in Catalan, "*Bona nit.*"

To her relief, Rob had recovered from his cross mood by breakfast time the following morning.

Jaime told them that the restaurant to which they were going was near the Pantano de Ulldecona, a great reservoir up in the hills. The prospect of exploring the lake made the boys more willing to face the Spanish family lunch party.

They reached the restaurant about half past one and, while Jaime and Paco were parking the two cars, the women and children looked down from the roadway to a shady place below the restaurant where people were cooking over fires, and drawing water from the spring from which the place took its name.

The restaurant was a long narrow room with some of the tables overlooking a waterfall and large, rock-bound pool. At Angelita's bidding, the two English boys took the seats next to the window to give them the best of the view,

then she and Ros faced each other with Jaime beside Ros. Thus placed, he and Angelita formed a bridge of communication between the English and Spanish members of the party.

Angelita also ordered the meal. It began with a dozen different dishes containing, among other things, snails striped like old-fashioned humbugs, titbits of pork and of fish, small savoury parcels of vegetables encased in batter, prawns, and spicy meat balls. This first course was accompanied by two large platters of bread, cut in pieces and sprinkled with the juice from tomatoes.

The main course was leg of lamb, or rather two legs, each garnished with onion and carved so as to provide a long, crisply cooked, meaty bone for the men, and plenty of succulent chops for the rest of the table.

"No veg?" murmured Rob, under his breath.

Ros gave him a warning glance. But Angelita, who had also heard the remark, said equably, "My husband says the same, *hijo*. He doesn't like meat without potatoes and greens, and when we are in England I give him what he prefers. But here we are in Spain, where the customs are different. Sometimes not as good, sometimes better, eh?" And to illustrate her point she gave the boys some more red wine.

"*Si, señora . . . gracias.*" *It was* Christopher who answered her, raising his glass and gave her a little bow.

It was a surprising gesture from a boy of his age, and it made Ros think that her sister had been wrong about him. He was going to have plenty of charm.

Angelita laughed, and returned the bow with a merry, "*Salud, guapo.*"

It was a cheerful meal, only slightly marred towards the end by lack of fresh air, a thickening fug of cigarette smoke and a rather deafening noise level. But these were

minor criticisms of an occasion which had reinforced Ros's liking for the Spanish.

Would Richard have enjoyed it? she wondered. Somehow she could not visualise him in these surroundings or among these simple, good-hearted people. But perhaps she was doing him an injustice.

When Jaime had paid the bill, and been presented with a cigar which, outside, he handed to Paco, they drove higher into the hills. Above the great wall of the dam, the green lake came into view. Here, many Spanish people, and a scattering of foreign tourists, were admiring the view and taking pictures of each other. But Jaime turned off the road, and followed an untarred track which led round the edge of the lake to a part, far away from the *fiesta* crowds, where the hills enclosed a timeless silence very restful to the ears after the babel in the restaurant.

"I like your nephew. He is more *simpático* than the other boy," said Angelita when, later in the afternoon, she and Ros were strolling apart from the three other adults. "Jaime told me about his tragedy, poor boy. He is lucky to have someone young and kind to take care of him."

"I sometimes wonder if he has got over it . . . or ever will, deep in his heart. It's a bad age to be badly hurt."

"Yes, a sensitive age, I agree. But I think it is not what happens to people but what is in them which matters," said Angelita. "If a person has character, they can overcome any difficulty, any pain. If they lack character, nothing ever goes well for them."

"Do you think so? I wonder," Ros mused.

"I know it," said Angelita firmly. "Look at my cousin Jaime. He ought to be a most unhappy man. But is he? No – he loves life. You know, I suppose, what was done to him as a child?"

"I know he was taken to England by his father's par-

ents, and sent away to boarding school at what I consider too young an age to leave home."

The Spanish woman threw up her hands and rolled her eyes heavenwards. "I see you don't know the whole story. He wouldn't tell you because he has put it behind him. But I thought perhaps someone else . . . However, I'll tell you about it, and then you'll see that what has happened to your nephew is bad – but not so bad that he'll never recover from it."

She wiped her sunglasses with a tissue, and replaced them on her nose before beginning, "The parents of Jaime's father were important landowners. The old man is dead now, but she is still alive. It was she who wore the trousers, as you say, and who was so cruel to Jaime, destroying the letters to him from Spain and telling him they had forgotten him."

"No!" said Ros disbelievingly.

"Yes!" Angelita assured her. "You see Mrs. Hatfield thought she could make *him* forget *them*; and when he grew up he would be completely an Englishman. Perhaps, if they had loved him, he would have done. But they were severe, stiff people. He was used to being kissed and petted, but in that house there was no affection, only formality. Can you imagine what it was like for him? – How miserable he was, *pobrecito*. He was cold because of the English weather. Their house was very grand and *histórica*, but it was never warm and comfortable. The food in Spain then was not good, but at least our mothers gave it flavour. It was better to eat than rice pudding and cabbage boiled for half an hour."

"How did Jaime find out about the letters?"

"There was a long drive between the gates and the house. Near the gates there was a cottage. The gardener who lived there had a son a few years older than Jaime.

When the postman delivered the letters, this boy, Peter, would take them to the house. Peter was interested in stamps and one day, when Jaime had learned to speak a little English, Peter asked him for the Spanish stamp on a letter which had come the day before. But Jaime had received no letter. So he said to his grandmother that it was strange he had not heard from his family recently, and she told him he mustn't expect any more letters from them. She said they were ignorant people, not accustomed to using a pen. She said it was natural for them to forget anyone who was far away."

"What a monstrous woman she must be!"

"Yes, but he didn't believe her. It was true that his family weren't educated, but they were good people. He knew they would never forget him, especially his mother. He asked Peter to help him. They persuaded Peter's sister to let Jaime use her address. She had been a maid at the house, and she didn't like Mrs. Hatfield. She lived in a town near there, and when she came to see her mother she brought the letters from Spain. So Mrs. Hatfield never knew that Jaime was keeping in touch with his family."

"But wasn't his mother worried by this arrangement? How did he explain it to her?"

"He never told her he was unhappy. He knew how much it would distress her. He pretended the address of Peter's sister was the town house of his father's family. Encarnacion believed him. If I told you an address in Barcelona, would you know if it was a large house or the home of unimportant people?"

"No, I wouldn't have any idea. But in that case, how was Mrs. Hatfield able to conceal his mother's last illness from him?"

"Encarnacion was working in Barcelona when she died. There was a fire in the building where she had a room, and she was terribly burned. All her belongings had been destroyed, and she was in great pain and confusion. She kept calling for Jaime, but when they asked her where he was, she could only remember the name of her father-in-law. There was a nun in the hospital who knew England and recognised the name. They assumed that Jaime must be a servant in the household, and they asked the police to send for him."

"And Mrs. Hatfield destroyed the telegram, too?" Ros asked, in an appalled voice.

"I'm sure she would have destroyed it, but luckily there was no telegram. The Spanish police contacted the English police, and they told the local police sergeant who went to the house. Jaime was at school at the time, and his grandmother said she would get in touch with the Headmaster immediately. She never did."

"So Encarnacion died without ever seeing him again?"

"Yes. But he was at her funeral."

"How had he found out about her? How in the world did he get there?"

"Most people in the village knew about the matter of the letters. These things get about. Mrs. Hatfield was very much disliked. The police sergeant told his wife about Jaime's mother being dangerously ill in Spain. Their daughter overheard and as she was Peter's girl she told him. Peter didn't trust Mrs. Hatfield, but he knew he couldn't telephone Jaime without someone finding out. He could only write to him. As soon as Jaime received the letter he borrowed money and came to Spain on a train."

"Without a passport?"

"He had one. The winter before this happened he had

been to Switzerland to ski. He would have run away sooner, but he felt it would finish his grandfather, and for him he had some affection. When the old man learned what had happened, and why, he had another stroke which killed him."

"What happened after the funeral? Did he never go back?"

"He had to go back," said Angelita. "Her lawyer made him go back. They thought they could force him to stay there until he was older. He was sixteen years old at this time. Mrs. Hatfield begged him to forgive her . . . to think of his father and of their property."

"Was there no one else to inherit?"

"Yes, several people, but cousins. He was the son of her son." The Spanish woman paused for a moment. "Jaime told his grandmother that unless she let him come back to Spain, and never interfered with him again, he would make a big scandal by telling it all to the papers. He meant it. He would have done it. So he came back to where he was born, and for two years he lived with my sister and her husband. But he couldn't settle. After a time he went off on his travels. It was years before he returned, but he wrote to them and sent money. When we saw him again, he was the captain of a ship. So you see why I say you shouldn't worry too much about your nephew. What happened to Jaime was terrible, but it hasn't marked him for life. He isn't a bitter man."

"No – no, he doesn't seem bitter," Ros agreed.

"Some people would call him a fool. He could have been rich. Now he has nothing," said Angelita, with a grimace. "But I understand how he felt." Her eyes flashed with angry fire. "I would have set fire to *her* house!"

"I wouldn't say Jaime had nothing," Ros remarked

thoughtfully. "Being a skipper carries great responsibilities. He must get an excellent salary, and he doesn't smoke, or drink, or gamble."

"He doesn't spend money: he gives it away," his cousin informed her dryly. "Jaime himself says nothing of it, but the people he helps are less silent." With the sudden flowery turn of speech which gave a Catalan flavour to her otherwise idiomatic English, she said, "One has to love the man for the kindness of his nature, but I think he may one day regret that he kept so little for himself."

It was not until late that night that Ros had time fully to ponder the details of Jaime's upbringing in relation to Christopher's history. As Angelita had said, in most respects Jaime did appear to be a contented and well-adjusted man, unsoured by his grandmother's egocentric and brutal disregard for any feelings but her own.

But his cousin had ignored one aspect of Jaime's life which was not quite normal. He was a bachelor. Could it be that he was unmarried because he was psychologically incapable of puting his emotions at risk again? And would Christopher, who had not been taken from his mother but had never been deeply loved by her, grow up with a similar infirmity?

The next day Jaime and the boys went sailing. Ros did not go with them because she wanted to spend the day bottling tomatoes and aubergines, and making peach chutney and paté, and preparing the pretty fruit sugars which she liked to have ready for certain puddings. In the course of all these activities she also made a shrimp salad, and baked a rabbit and, at Rob's request, a Dutch apple cake.

It was the sort of calmly busy day which she particularly enjoyed, and when she had finished the bottling –

which she did, Spanish-fashion, in wine bottles – she felt the sense of achievement which preserving and storing always gave her.

After supper the four of them played cards, using a colourful Spanish pack in which the clubs looked like red, green and yellow prize marrows. The other suits were swords – great blue-bladed mediaeval weapons – ornate scarlet cups, and gold medallions. All the court cards were male, the Queens being replaced by mounted knights.

But for his recent change of attitude, after the boys had gone to bed, Ros would have expected Jaime to suggest a stroll, or to offer to cook some hot *tapas*. However she was not surprised when he said an early night would do them all good.

The day before Richard's return, they went for another excursion into the country, this time to visit the walled fortress town of Morella, about forty miles inland.

They had gone only about eight miles when, round a bend in the road, they came upon a serious accident. It must have happened only a few minutes earlier. The driver of one of the cars was climbing dazedly out from behind his wheel. It was the other car which had borne the brunt of the collision. The bonnet was a crumpled mess and, as they passed, Ros caught a horrified glimpse of a woman passenger, unconscious, her face veiled in blood.

For an instant Ros thought incredulously that Jaime was not going to stop. But he pulled the car into the verge a short way behind the second car, and said, "About half a kilometre on there's a restaurant. Tell them what's happened, and ask them to call the police. I'll stay here and do what I can until help arrives."

"But I –"

"Do as you're told, there's a good girl." His voice was still quiet and calm, but there was a note in it which made her slide quickly across to the seat he had vacated.

On the way to the restaurant, she groped in her mind for the words to explain to the people there. All her Spanish seemed to have deserted her. But although, afterwards, she could never recall exactly what she had found to say, when it came to the point she had had no difficulty in making them understand the urgency of the situation.

"What do we do now? Go back for James?" asked Rob, when the police had been summoned.

It was then that Ros noticed the expression on Christopher's face, and realised the emotional impact of the scene they had witnessed down the road on a boy who, not so long ago, had lost both parents in a motor accident. Until then it had been her intention to leave the boys at the restaurant while she returned to Jaime. Now it seemed wiser to stay with her nephew.

"I think we might be more hindrance than help, Rob. We'll wait for him to come to us."

It was nearly an hour later, and the boys were watching television even though they could not understand what was being said, when Ros noticed the proprietor beckoning to her from a doorway at the rear of the premises. The conspiratorial style of his signals caused her to tell the boys she was going to the loo.

The man led her to the kitchen where Jaime was leaning against a table, drinking a glass of black coffee.

"Hello, Ros. I slipped in by the back way because of all this" – indicating the blood spattered all over his clothing. "I thought it might upset Christopher."

"That's the reason I didn't come back for you. I didn't

want him to see the accident again, and nor did I want to leave the boys here in case, without thinking, Rob started to discuss the gruesome details with him."

"Very sensible of you. I hoped you'd keep them out of the way. It was a grim business."

"Was that poor woman . . . dead?"

"No, but badly cut about. So was the driver."

A woman entered the kitchen, carrying some clothes over her arm.

"These people are kindly lending me a change of kit," Jaime explained.

He put them on in a store room leading off the kitchen. The trousers were six inches too short for his long legs, and six inches too large at the waist. But he thanked the Spanish couple warmly and promised to return the borrowed garments as soon as possible.

"If you won't be too disappointed, I think we'll go to Morella another day. We've lost rather a lot of time, and I don't feel these pants are quite me," he said, with a grin. He turned out his toes and, hands in pockets, extended the baggy waistlines which only his own black belt prevented from falling to his knees.

"No, let's give it a miss," Ros agreed.

In spite of his clowning about the trousers, she suspected that what he had seen that morning had upset him more than he would show. It was part of his job to stay cool in emergencies. He was trained to take command of any difficult situation if no one better qualified was present. But he was not a doctor, accustomed and necessarily hardened to the sight of motorists' injuries. Moreover, an injured Spanish woman, even when the circumstances were different, must surely remind him of what had happened to his mother.

The boys did not object to the change of plan. The

fierce heat of early August made any drive inland something of an endurance test, and their interest in the mountain stronghold was already much weaker than their longing for a cooling swim.

Thus it was that the picnic lunch was eaten in the shadow of *Seabird's* awning instead of beneath the branches of a roadside olive tree, as had been planned.

After lunch, the boys went to the Club pool to practise diving. Jaime shook his head in response to their invitation to him to join them.

"No, thanks, *chicos*. I'm going to snooze for an hour."

While he dozed in the sun, Ros opened a copy of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* which she had borrowed from his bookshelves. She flipped back and forth among the pages and eventually chose to begin with the description of the Prioress in the Prologue. But the iced *champaña* she had drunk with her lunch had made her drowsy and she found it an effort to make sense of the fourteenth-century style. Yawning, she skipped several lines, tempted to follow Jaime's example.

Suddenly, as her glance drifted down the page, her dwindling interest was caught by a line which seemed familiar.

. . . Her nose tretys; her eyen grey as glass . . .

Ros consulted the footnotes and found that *tretys* meant neat. Then she remembered where she had heard the words before. Jaime had said them to her, leaning on the table after dinner, one night not long after her arrival.

The fair Rostangue . . . her nose neat; her eyes grey as glass; her mouth full small, and thereto soft and red.

Out of his well-stocked mind he had picked a few lines of verse which fitted her strange name so perfectly that she had thought they belonged to it, and would have asked

him for his source if it would not have seemed like fishing for further compliments.

For the following half an hour she neither read nor slept, but sat reflecting that it would be hard to say who was the more complex character: the owner of *Seabird*, or her skipper.

Presently Jaime stirred, and softly Ros rose from her chair and padded silently away. His eyes were still closed when she returned, but at the tinkle of ice cubes he opened them.

"In one of your past lives, you must have been the Caliph's favourite handmaiden," he said, with a smile, sitting up to take one of the glasses from the tray she was holding.

He had swung his legs off the lounger, and Ros seated herself on the end of it and placed the tray on the cushion between them. She fingered the straw in her orange juice.

"Jaime, have I done something to offend you?"

"Of course not." His tone was casual. He took a long draught of his beer.

"You've seemed much less friendly lately."

He adjusted his end of the lounger from a reclining position to one more upright. Then he relaxed against it. But she sensed that his mind was not relaxed. Deliberately, she had chosen to raise this subject as soon as he roused from his nap, when he was less alert than usual and, so she hoped, less capable of polite evasions.

"Not less friendly, Ros," he said quietly. And the hazel eyes were wide awake now. "Less *amoroso*, perhaps."

"Because of something Richard has said? Or because *you* prefer it that way?"

He looked her straight in the eyes, and she felt oddly tense as she waited for him to reply.

But her question was never answered because at that

moment the approach of a high-powered car made them both turn their heads towards the sound.

Jaime rose to his feet. "It's Richard. I wonder what brings him back earlier than he intended?"

CHAPTER FIVE

"Hello, Rostangue . . . James. Everyone's well, I hope? Where are the boys?" was Richard's greeting, as he joined them on the after deck.

"They're at the pool. We're all fit. What brings you back a day early?" asked Jaime.

"There was no further need for me to stay." Richard relaxed on a lounger, flexing his shoulders as if they were stiff after his journey.

"Shall I get you a cold drink?" asked Ros. "Or would you prefer a shower first?"

Not that he looked hot, she thought. Richard might feel it sometimes, but he never actually looked travel-weary.

"I'll have a Bacardi and lime with plenty of ice, and then I'll have another to drink in the shower," he replied.

As she moved to go, Jaime touched her arm and checked her. "Stay – I'll get it."

When he had left them, Richard said, "I brought you a present. I hope it's the right size." He handed her a small box in Fortnum & Mason wrappings.

Had he not mentioned size, she would have expected it to contain some luxurious chocolate, or possibly *marrons glacés*. But when she opened the box the contents sprang out and made her give a little jump as if she had released a jack-in-the-box. It was not a toy which startled her, but a burst of wonderful colour. It flowed over her lap as blue as the sky overhead, as green as the sea round Menorca. She found, when she examined it, that it was a

tiny bikini and matching caftan. It was made from a fabric which looked and felt like finest silk, and which had survived the box without showing a single crease.

"Richard, it's beautiful!" she said, and indeed the colour was magical.

"Good. I hoped you'd like it. Will it fit you?"

She glanced at the discreet size tag. "Yes, perfectly." Then she came down to earth. "But I can't accept it."

His eyebrows contracted. "Why not?"

"Because –" She paused, seeking a tactful excuse, but finding only the blunt truth. "Because I've been to Fortnum & Mason's; I know what they charge for marvellous resort clothes like this."

Fifty or sixty pounds, perhaps even more, she added mentally.

Richard's frown became darker, and the muscles of his jaw clenched and unclenched. But before he could speak a voice from behind him said, "If I had been to England and brought you the latest thing in swimsuits from Marks & Spencer, you'd accept it, wouldn't you?"

"I suppose so – yes. But that's quite different."

"Not really," said Jaime. "Richard shops at Fortnum's as routinely as I might shop at Marks & Sparks. It's all relative."

"Precisely," Richard agreed, with something of a snap.

To find Jaime opposing her scruples added chagrin to her embarrassment. It wasn't fair of him to gang up on her; surely he, of all people, should see that Richard's wealth was irrelevant? Some presents were acceptable, and others were not; and the fact that the cost of a Grima jewel probably meant no more to a Paul Getty than the cost of a Corocraft ornament to a man of ordinary means did not make them equally acceptable.

"Well, I'm sorry," she said, in a low tone. "I appreciate

your kindness, and the last thing I want to do is to seem ungrateful or ungracious. But I wouldn't feel comfortable if I accepted such an expensive present. I'm sorry, Richard. Please don't be offended with me." On the last words her voice shook suddenly and, to her surprise and consternation, she realised she was close to tears.

Leaving the box and its contents on the lounger, she muttered a husky "Excuse me", and hurried below.

In the privacy of her quarters she was able to pull herself together, but it was so unlike her to cry that she could not understand herself. Lying on the bed, with the door locked, she remembered Richard's expression when she had begun to demur, and she shrank from the thought of the displeasure he must be feeling towards her now. Added to her regret at upsetting him was her disappointment at having to refuse something so much to her taste.

The intercom buzzed and she expected to hear Jaime's voice warning her that Richard was furious with her.

But it was Richard himself who said, "Rostangue, are you all right?" He sounded not angry but anxious.

"Yes – yes, of course."

"You seemed upset when you left us."

"I was," she admitted. "I'm not usually emotional. Perhaps the car smash this morning –"

"Car smash? James hasn't mentioned –"

"It didn't happen to us. It was an accident we saw. James was involved afterwards. He looked after the people until an ambulance arrived. But the boys and I waited for him at a restaurant further along the road."

"I see. Even so, it's always a harrowing thing to witness, even briefly." He paused. "James has gone to join the boys. Do you feel equal to coming on deck again?"

"Yes – if you wish."

As she changed the bathing suit she had been wearing

when he arrived for a skirt and sun-top, she wondered what he meant to say to her.

When she joined him on deck, all sign of his present to her had disappeared, and there was nothing aloof in his manner as he said, "I know you don't normally drink spirits, but why not stretch a point on this occasion?" – indicating the tray which James had brought to him earlier.

"All right, I will." Ros watched him drop ice cubes into his own and an unused glass, add lime juice, white rum and soda, and finally add to each one a thick slice from a fresh lemon.

"*Salud*," she said, rather tentatively, before she put the glass to her lips.

"*Salud*. Now: tell me what you've all been doing in my absence."

She gave him a résumé of their activities, and ended, "The boys have been very good. Have you thought of that treat you promised them?"

"Yes, I've organised that. Has James also stayed in line?"

The question reminded her of the one she had put to Jaime half an hour ago, and which Richard's unexpected arrival had prevented – or saved – him from answering.

"James' behaviour has been exemplary," she said, in a flat tone. "Now that you're back, have you any special plans? When I first arrived, you mentioned that later in the season you would need my quarters for your guests."

"Yes, I did; but I've decided not to have a yacht party this summer. I had a succession of guests last year, and although I believe they enjoyed themselves, I can't say that I derived a great deal of pleasure from their com-

pany. I must spend two or three days here, and then I think we'll go over to Menorca again. It's Rob's favourite place, and I've no doubt Christopher will share his enthusiasm."

"I'm sure he will."

"You like Menorca, don't you?"

"How could anyone not?"

"Splendid." He leaned towards her, and the expression in his eyes was unfamiliar and difficult to analyse. "Perhaps it was partly the accident which upset you, but it was also my fault. I should have realised you would have scruples about accepting anything but the most trivial gift. I'm sorry, Rostangue."

"Oh, please, don't apologise, Richard. You make me feel worse than ever. Will they – will Fortnum's take it back?" she asked worriedly.

"I'm sure they would if I asked them. I have an account there. But I don't propose to ask. The time may come when you do feel able to accept it."

She was not sure what he meant. By her lights, there was only one situation which would make it possible for her to take expensive presents from him. Surely he couldn't mean *that*?

A faint smile curled Richard's mouth. "When you have been cooking for me for five years, for example. Although it seems rather unlikely that you will still be a career woman five years hence."

She said, with more composure than she felt, "That I can't say, of course. But I'm glad *you* can contemplate the possibility. A little while ago I had an uneasy feeling that you might not be having your usual yacht party because of doubts that the galley-slave was equal to it."

"If I didn't think the galley-slave was equal to anything – in a culinary sense – I might require of her, I

should have sent her packing some time ago," Richard replied dryly. He drained his glass and stood up. "At least I think I would," he added thoughtfully. "Excuse me, I'm going for a shower."

He left Ros with much on her mind. But although the inferences which she drew from their conversation all seemed to point to one conclusion, it was only a supposition, and she could not convince herself that Richard Livingstone, the quarry of such beautiful, worldly creatures as Ellen Booth, could have serious intentions towards as ordinary a girl as herself. Yet if he were not interested in her as a girl as well as a cook, why bring her a lavish present? Why add that significant rider, 'At least I think I would'?

When, later, Rob also enquired about his father's promised treat, it turned out that what Richard had organised was a ciné-camera for his son, and a spear gun for Christopher.

Naturally the boys were delighted, and Ros hid her own disapproval. She thought it wrong to give children presents except on their birthdays or at Christmas, or when by a great effort at school or because of an illness they had earned a special reward. To present a boy with a ciné-camera merely because he had not misbehaved for a week seemed to her an over-indulgence.

Although he said nothing, she suspected that Jaime shared her opinion. It struck her that while no one could accuse Richard of being a neglectful father, too immersed in his business affairs to give much time to his son, he lacked Jaime's easy way with the boys.

Richard would spend a whole day skiing or skin-diving with them, but he took no part in their less sophisticated activities. It was Jaime who showed an interest in a working model of a power press which Christopher

made with Rob's Meccano, and Jaime to whom they turned when something went wrong with the spear gun.

The contrast in the characters of the two men often occupied Ros's thoughts in the days following Richard's return. She came to see that while he could be an excellent companion on his own wavelength, he would not or could not be equally companionable on other people's wavelengths. Jaime was different. He could tune in to anyone's wavelength. He liked people and found them interesting. Richard's nature was more aloof and less tolerant. She remembered the party at Casa Gwenfred and how Jaime had spoken kindly of the newly rich, ebullient Lockwoods, but Richard had barely concealed his disdain for their vulgarity.

"It was not very helpful of you to add your weight to Richard's the other day," she said to Jaime, when there was an opportunity to speak of the matter.

He looked blank for a moment. When he realised what she meant, he said, "I thought your scruples were unnecessary. Richard had no ulterior motive."

"I'm sure he hadn't, but even so –" She finished the sentence with a gesture.

"How women brood," said Jaime, with a quizzical look. "I'm sure Richard has forgotten about it. Certainly I had. But here you are, still fretting about it."

"Not *fretting*. It just happened to cross my mind, and I thought it worth mentioning."

"All right: I apologise. I should have minded my own business. But it seemed to me that Richard would have enjoyed giving it to you; you would have enjoyed wearing it; and everyone would have enjoyed seeing you in it. All that being so, wasn't it rather foolish to bow to the convention that only flowers and chocolates are acceptable?"

"Any number of things are acceptable. A book, a record, an ornament, even a cooking pot. But nothing as wildly expensive as those beach clothes."

"I told you a long time ago that you were an old-fashioned girl. I was right," he said.

"You once told me something about yourself; something I've never understood."

"Oh? What was that?"

Was it her imagination, or had a certain wariness entered his manner?

"I asked you if you had been married, and you said that if you had ever had a wife you would still have her. I thought you meant because you were a Catholic, and you told me you had no religion. Then we were interrupted, and the subject never came up again. What *did* you mean by that remark?"

For a moment she thought he was going to sidestep the question with some light, evasive reply. But, after a pause, he said, "One could cite a hundred reasons why marriages founder, but I think there are two basic reasons. Either a man doesn't really know the girl he has married, or he doesn't know himself. Sometimes it takes people half a lifetime to know themselves. Then they may find they're in the wrong job and married to the wrong woman."

He paused and, when Ros said nothing, went on, "I shed my illusions rather early in life. By the time I was twenty, I knew myself – and the kind of girl who would suit me."

"But you never found her?"

He shrugged. "Not many Spanish families want a heretic for a son-in-law, and in England respectable desk men are more highly regarded than yachtmasters. Also, very few owners want to provide accommodation for the skipper's wife and children."

"No, I suppose not."

Later, she pondered his remark, for it could be taken to mean there had been girls he would have liked to marry, had they been willing. Or he could have meant that, feeling himself to be ineligible, he had never risked a rebuff.

The latter she could not believe. Jaime was not the sort of man who would be put off attempting something because of a probability of failure. Indeed, if she judged him correctly, the smaller the chance of success, the greater the challenge to him.

Therefore she had to conclude that her first interpretation was the right one. An odd little spasm of anger went through her as she thought of him loving a Spanish girl, and being cold-shouldered by her parents because he did not subscribe to their narrow tenets. But while Spanish girls might not rebel against their parents' opinions, surely no English girl worth her salt would be put off Jaime because he was not in one of the safe, superannuated occupations?

Perhaps the truth of the matter lay in his final remark that owners preferred unmarried skippers. It could be that his impulses towards marriage had never been as strong as his love for the sea.

Ros's second visit to Menorca was very different from her first, when all she had seen of the island was the harbour at Port Mahon.

This time they anchored in the mouth of an inlet on the southern coast of the island. It being August, during the day the beach at Binibeca was crowded with package tourists and the occupants of the villas which clustered the hillside like white mushrooms. But early in the morning, and from late afternoon on, the pink beach

was comparatively deserted. If anyone on *Seabird* wanted isolation during the day, they had only to take the powerboat and speed westwards to find various coves among the cliffs which, being inaccessible from inland, were still untouched by tourism.

At Binibeca, the water which lapped the rosy shell-sand was the colour of an aquamarine, and below the surface shoals of little pearly fish swam this way and that, unfrightened by the great goggled monsters who invaded their domain and peered at them during the day. On the rocks on the eastern side of the inlet there was a white fisherman's hut with a garnet-red door which had been converted to a beach bar. And between the beach and the villa colony ran a road with a car park where, under a canopy of brushwood, a car was kept for whenever anyone on *Seabird* wished to shop, or to explore the interior of the island.

One day Richard took Ros and the boys to Ciudadela, the old capital at the western end of the island. As in Mahon, the new capital, the shops there were full of tempting, island-made shoes, but Ros resisted them, mindful that Christopher was growing with the speed of a kangaroo vine, and would probably need half his uniform renewing before the year was out.

August was really too hot for comfortable sightseeing, and although she enjoyed her early morning excursions to the fruit and fish markets in Mahon, she had to agree with the boys that the best places to be on a broiling day were lazing under *Seabird*'s awning, sucking a straw dipped in ice-cold Coke, or deep in the golden-green world beneath the sea.

They had been at the island for a week when Mahon had its fiesta. All the little towns in Menorca had fiestas during the season, but Mahon's was the biggest and best,

culminating in a magnificent display of fireworks over the harbour. Later that night while Ramon and the boys went to a barbecue put on by one of the holiday companies, Richard and Jaime and Ros attended a private party at the home of a wealthy South African. Like many of the island's foreign residents, he had bought his Menorcan property as a bolt-hole in case political upheavals disturbed his way of life elsewhere.

The original house was old, and had been extended to form a flower-filled courtyard from which the party overflowed into rooms full of antique furniture and gardens set about with modern sculptures. The furniture had once belonged to officers of the English garrisons which had held the island for the greater part of the eighteenth century.

Since her arrival in Spain, Ros had been keeping in reserve a dress made of fine batik cotton in shades of dark curry and cream which set off her tan to perfection. With it she wore a necklace and ear-rings cast off by Margot MacLaren. To anyone but a connoisseur, they appeared to be made of green jade, in fact they were Peking glass, much less valuable but only a little less beautiful.

In the car on the way to the party, with Richard driving, Ros beside him, and Jaime lounging in the back, she remembered the Lockwoods' party, her first in Spain. Since then there had been a subtle alteration in the balance of her relationship with the two men. She had the feeling that tonight, if she felt chilly on the return journey, it would be Richard, not Jaime, who would lend her his coat.

There was no dancing at the party. Most of the guests were middle-aged or elderly, and it was an occasion for eating, drinking *champaña*, chatting, and strolling about to admire the host's many treasures.

Their hostess was a throaty-voiced woman who overheard Ros say to Richard that she did not understand a certain sculpture, and who immediately seized her by the arm and led her about, explaining the finer points of all the abstract works of art.

It turned out that she was an amateur sculptress – she told Ros to call her Gigi – but her own work was representational, including some charming heads of children.

"You have an unusual face," she told Ros, standing back to appraise her through narrowed eyes. "People's bones and their mouths interest me. I respond to forms, not to colours. Now where is that head which really makes my fingers itch?" – and her eyes widened again and scanned the groups in the courtyard until, with an "Ah!" of satisfaction, she tapped Ros on the arm, and said, "There! That's the man. I wonder who he is? He must be a guest of a guest."

"He's Richard Livingstone's skipper. His name is Jai – James Hatfield," said Ros. By this time Richard had left them, waylaid by someone he knew who wanted to talk to him.

"Really? You must introduce me. Perhaps I can coax him to sit for me."

"Why do you find his face interesting?"

"My dear, look at his mouth. Don't you see how revealing it is?"

"Not really."

"Well, of course you're much younger than I am, with less experience of men," said Gigi, with a rather wicked grin. She was probably sixty, but attractive in spite of her wrinkles. "His mouth – in fact his whole face – is *the* most fascinating conflict. That full, slightly crooked lower lip shows humour and great sensuality, but the up-

per lip is thinner. Self-disciplined. From his chin and his cheekbones, I'd say he could be a tough cookie in a tight spot. Yet he has an intellectual's forehead. A very strange combination, but attractive, wouldn't you agree? I'm surprised he's English. There's something foreign about him."

"His mother was Spanish."

"Oh, that explains it."

Ros said, "Has Richard Livingstone a sculpturable face?"

"Yes, up to a point. He's good-looking, and he has a certain magnetism. But there's no devilment there, and not much humour or tenderness." She gave Ros a sideways glance. "Perhaps I shouldn't have said that."

"Why not? I'm his cook, not his girl-friend."

"Here he comes to retrieve you," said Gigi, and she drifted away to speak to a woman in blue.

It was after supper that Richard said, "Shall we wander round the garden?"

The garden, like the buffet, had been expertly planned. It had the mysterious atmosphere essential to beautiful gardens. Steps led from level to level, archways framed intriguing vistas, creepers made secluded corners, cool by day and dark by night.

In one of these shadowy bowers, they sat to watch a fountain playing.

"You always look right for the occasion," said Richard suddenly. "You dress well. You talk pleasantly to people. In fact you seem to have all the qualities a man hopes to find in a woman. So much so that I should like to persuade you to stay with me permanently. Not in your present rôle, but as my wife."

When, after a pause, she remained silent, he added, "You seem taken aback. Surely you must have been aware of my increasing regard for you?"

"I – I've been aware that you liked me . . . but not that you loved me," she answered. "*Is* that what you're saying, Richard? – That you love me?"

This time it was he who did not reply immediately. At length, he said, "I won't pretend to be in the euphoric state known as 'being in love'. To be frank, if I were in that condition, I should not be proposing marriage to you, but some less unalterable relationship. That may shock you, but I have every reason to know how misleading violent emotions can be. I don't intend to repeat my previous mistake."

"Aren't you going from one extreme to the other? Isn't it equally unwise to contemplate marriage with a total absence of emotion?"

"That isn't the case by any means. I find you not only likeable, but extremely attractive." And he demonstrated this statement by taking her in his arms.

Had she expected his embrace, Ros would have supposed that somehow it would clarify her feelings towards him. In fact it left her no wiser, but merely confirmed her experience that, except when the man was a whisky-breathing, middle-aged menace like one of the least important directors of the firm which had employed her as their boardroom cook, being kissed was always a pleasant experience.

Excluding Jaime, who had never actually kissed her properly, Richard was some years older than the other men who had made love to her. Naturally there was nothing tentative about the way he took hold of her, but neither was he unwilling to release her when she drew

away. It was all very smooth and enjoyable, and completely unilluminating. She had felt no rapture in his arms, but perhaps she was too prosaic a person ever to experience such an ethereal emotion.

"You must give me time to think," she said, rather out of breath.

"By all means – as long as you like." He drew her to her feet. "Now I think we'd better go back, or people may begin to gossip."

The only person who seemed to notice their return was Jaime. He was sitting with an elderly man when Ros and Richard re-entered the central courtyard, and Ros saw him looking in their direction and smiled at him. He did not return the smile, and she had the curious feeling that he knew what had taken place in the shadows by the fountain. She asked Richard to excuse her for a few minutes, and went to their hostess's bedroom to check her make-up. But when she looked in the mirror, there was nothing to show that she had been in Richard's arms. Her hair was not ruffled, nor was her lipstick smudged. It had not been that kind of embrace. But, even if it had, there was no reason why she should feel embarrassed about it. Had she been more compliant, Jaime himself would have kissed her on more than one occasion. It was nonsensical to feel that he would disapprove of Richard succeeding where he had failed. Probably the explanation of his unsmiling stare was that he had been gazing in their direction without seeing them, his thoughts far away from the party.

It was nearly two o'clock in the morning when she went to bed and could think about Richard's proposal. Her first reaction was that for her to become Richard's wife would be a splendid thing for Christopher. It would give him all the backing, financial and influential, he might need to

launch him on his career, and he would feel more secure emotionally with a man in his background instead of only an aunt.

Her second reaction was that all this ran counter to her beliefs about marriage. Love, and love only, had seemed the proper motive for wedlock, and although she found Richard attractive, she could not pretend to be in love with him.

Nevertheless, if she were to be completely honest, there was a degree of temptation in being offered marriage by a man with his life style. As the second Mrs. Richard Livingstone she could have everything she had ever wanted; a beautiful house full of antiques, Persian rugs and original paintings; clothes made of silk and wool, and shoes made of leather; the kitchen of her dreams with a big kitchen garden and a herb garden; indeed every figment of her daydreams from a four-poster bed to a dovecote, and an orchard with beehives under the apple trees.

When she awoke the next morning, she did not immediately recall the events of the previous evening. When she did remember, it was with a sense of oppression rather than elation. And before the end of the day her dilemma was intensified by Richard pointing out an aspect of the situation which had not, at that stage, occurred to her.

Before lunch, while the others were swimming, he came to the galley where she was arranging a salad to go with the fish mousse. She was wearing a striped butcher's apron over a dry bathing suit, and her damp hair was bundled inside the blue terry cap which had been an unexpected and rather touching present from Christopher. She had remarked that such caps were useful, and the next time the boys had gone to Mahon he had spent all his pocket money on one.

"Are you impatient for your *tapas*? They won't be long," she said, indicating a platter of *albondígas* which were waiting to be fried.

"No, I wanted a word with you," he said, coming to stand by the worktop where she was busy.

Jaime or the boys would have filched a piece of pepper or carrot, but Richard was the kind of man who did not notice food unless it was presented to him on a table or a tray at one of the accepted times for eating.

"I've been thinking things over, and I've realised that when a man proposes to a woman who is on his staff, he places her in a somewhat awkward situation," he explained. "I'm concerned that you shouldn't feel that to turn down my offer will necessitate your finding another job. If, when you make up your mind, your answer is 'no', then I'm sure we are both sufficiently sensible to continue as we are without awkwardness."

"Oh . . . yes, I hope so."

"And I hope it isn't necessary to tell you," Richard continued, "that if your decision is favourable, I shall be very happy to share your responsibility for Christopher until he is grown-up."

"You are very kind . . . very good," she said, rather stiltedly.

'If your decision is favourable' – what a stiff, business-jargonish phrase to apply to a bond which most people sealed with kisses rather than words.

He did not linger to chat while she cooked the *albondígas*. He seldom came to the galley, and when he did he seemed out of place there.

Unlike Jaime who fits in everywhere, Ros thought inconsequently.

After lunch, while the others were water-skiing, she

lay on deck, sunbathing and thinking. Instead of being comforted by what Richard had said to her earlier, she felt increasingly troubled. Theoretically, it might sound possible, but she was not convinced that, in practice, a woman could continue to work for a man she had rejected as a husband.

The following day Richard received an urgent summons from England. His father was gravely ill and not expected to live. Within an hour of receiving the news, he was on his way home by air.

Ros saw him leave with mixed feelings. She was sorry that his errand was a sad one, but she had a sense of relief at being freed from the aura of his powerful personality. Even though he had promised her ample time to consider his offer, the proximity in which they lived was itself an influence on her. In his absence she could think more clearly, or so she hoped.

For two days after his departure she wrestled with her dilemma while trying to appear as carefree as she had been before his proposal. But half an hour before supper on the third evening they had spent without Richard, while she was whipping cream to decorate the boys' favourite pudding, a treacle tart, Jaime came to the galley and surprised her by asking, as he took some beer from the ice box, "Is anything the matter, Ros? You don't seem quite yourself."

"Not myself? What do you mean?"

"You only pecked at your lunch today, and you seem not to be sleeping well. I happened to be on deck when your light went on at two this morning. It was still alight at three. I know you sometimes read late, but not until the small hours. You haven't got toothache, have you? You're not nervous of having to visit a Spanish dentist?"

"Oh, no – it's nothing like that," she answered, realis-

ing only after she had spoken that such a reply was a tacit admission that there was something on her mind. Suddenly, the need to confide was overwhelming. "The fact is . . . Richard has asked me to marry him."

Jaime uncapped the bottle and poured the beer into a glass. He did not seem astonished by her announcement. "Have you accepted?" he asked.

Ros shook her head. "I was thunderstruck. The idea had never occurred to me. At least not as a serious possibility."

"Merely as an impossible pipe dream?"

"No, not as that either. I'll admit I did sometimes wonder if Richard found me attractive, but not with any thought of marriage. I'm not looking out for a husband, and he – well, he could have anyone."

"He could have his pick of pretty gold-diggers," Jaime said dryly.

"Oh, come on, Jaime," she remonstrated. "As you yourself said once before, he's not a rich old goat with only his money to recommend him. Richard is young and good-looking."

"In that case, why not snap him up?"

It was some time before she answered. "Because we don't love each other. He likes me. He finds me attractive. But he could live without me . . . and I without him."

"The English are obsessed with the idea of romantic love. It's the cause of half their broken marriages," Jaime said sardonically. "In America, sex is the obsession. People there can be happy and successful in a dozen different aspects of their lives. But if their sex life doesn't conform to what they are told is the proper pattern, they feel themselves to be failures. I think both outlooks are crazy. The only sound basis for marriage is friendship. A husband and wife should be each other's best friend."

Ros remembered something Margot had once said to her.

"'Kissing don't last: cookery do'," she murmured aloud.

"Exactly," Jaime agreed. "But for cooking substitute kindness. A life is a long time, Ros, and being sixty or seventy is as much a part of it as twenty and thirty. When the kissing has to stop, it's a help to laugh at the same jokes, to have interests in common."

"Do you think, if your father hadn't been killed, that your parents would have lived to regret their marriage?"

"Probably: who can say?"

She began to transfer the thickened cream from the bowl to a serving dish. "Would you advise me to marry Richard?"

"My dear girl, no one can advise another person on a subject as serious as marriage. I could advise you about buying a boat, or something of that sort. But how to earn a living and whom to marry are decisions we all have to make off our own bat."

"Yes – it was a silly question," she admitted. "But sometimes talking things over with someone helps one to see a situation more clearly."

"I think it's a safe bet that Richard wouldn't make you unhappy. He's not a womaniser. He has no mean streaks in his nature that I've ever noticed. You would have every possible material comfort. But whether he could make you happy –" He ended the sentence with a shrug.

"And – which is equally important – could I make him happy?" she said.

Jaime finished his beer, and rinsed the glass under the tap. He wiped it dry and put it back in the glass cupboard. He alone, of everyone on board, never made extra work

for other people, but Ros had come to the conclusion that this was not because it was his nature to be obsessively tidy, but rather that he had been trained to live in conditions where neatness was a necessity. Not all ships offered quarters as spacious as those on *Seabird*, even for their captains.

She thought he was not going to make any comment on her question. But when he had closed the cupboard, he turned to face her, and said, "I should think any man who had you to share his bed and board couldn't fail to be happy. I'll go and round up the boys." And he walked out of the galley.

Richard returned from England with the news that his father had died.

When Ros expressed sympathy, he said, "It was better for him to go quickly than to linger as an invalid with no one of his own to look after him. My mother died five years ago, soon after Father retired, and since then he's been on his own, apart from some daily help. He would have hated to be bedridden in a nursing home."

"What did he do during his working life?"

"He was a small town butcher. He began as an errand boy and ended by owning three shops."

"He must have been very proud of your success."

"Not really. He thought I took too many risks. He'd been enterprising up to a point, but he disapproved of credit and he didn't understand investment. It's as well he lived when he did. He would never have survived in these inflationary times, with the multiples multiplying and the small shops going to the wall."

"Have you any brothers or sisters?"

"One sister. She lives in Australia."

A day or two later, there was an opportunity for Ros to

say, "Richard, I don't want to pry, but I feel I must know something about your marriage, and the reasons why it didn't last."

"Certainly you should know. I had every intention of telling you," Richard agreed. "I was twenty-two when I married Valerie. She was nineteen. I don't know why she preferred me to her other admirers. I can only tell you why I wanted her. She was an exceptionally pretty girl, and she also had an excellent figure. For a time I was so mesmerised by her looks that I didn't consider her character, or her intelligence. In fact she turned out to have what people call a sweet nature. Had she had any brains in her head, our marriage might not have failed."

"I hope you are not overestimating my mental powers," said Ros. "I am a practical person, not an intellectual."

"You read. You have opinions. You have some idea of what is going on in the world. You don't always agree with everything I say. To be brutally frank, my wife was a charming-looking ninny. While Robert was a small child, he kept her happy.

"She used to visit her mother every day, and they would go shopping together, and talk about nothing for hours. Then I began to be successful, and Robert went to a prep school and Valerie's mother died suddenly."

He sprang up from his chair and began to pace about restlessly. Ros could feel his reluctance to dredge up memories which had sunk below the level of daily recollection. But although she had no wish to cause him pain, she felt it was impossible seriously to contemplate a future with him unless she knew about his past.

"To help Val get over her mother, I bought a large house before I could really afford it. I thought doing the place up would be an occupation and a distraction for her. Somehow I had overlooked the fact that she had no taste;

that her only criterion was whether a thing was expensive or not. The house was a Queen Anne manor – pink brick, tall white windows with shutters. You know the sort of place."

Ros nodded.

"You wouldn't believe how many execrable objects can be found in the so-called best shops," Richard continued, with a grimace. "If I hadn't noticed what was happening, the house would have been ruined – at vast expense! The only solution was to call in a professional decorator which, on top of the money already wasted, made the whole operation even more costly than I had anticipated."

Ros said nothing, but she could not help feeling a pang of sympathy for Valerie. Some women were blessed with instinctive good taste, but most had to learn it by observation and trial and error. To pluck a girl out of suburbia and expect her to know how to furnish a large country house was asking the impossible. Surely a wise husband would have suggested a course in interior decoration before throwing such a challenging project at her?

"Val had never been much of a cook," Richard went on. "But even with someone to cook for her, she was a hopeless hostess. It isn't necessary for a woman to be a brilliant conversationalist. She need only know how to listen. Val never mastered the art of drawing people out. Her only flair was for picking a subject of no interest to the person to whom she was talking, and chattering non-stop until I came to their rescue. At dinner parties that wasn't always possible, and I would have to sit and watch her bore the pants off an important contact."

He stopped pacing and turned to face her, a bleak look in his grey eyes. For the first time the mask was off, and his inner self was exposed.

"But none of these things was the reason our marriage

broke down. The official reason was that she was unfaithful to me. The fundamental cause was that she was bored and lonely because I had neither the time nor inclination to amuse her. She had no resources, you see. Most women in her situation would have filled their time with golf or petit-point or committee work. But none of the usual sports or hobbies appealed to Valerie, and she was never asked to sit on any committees."

"For many women children are the most fulfilling occupation," Ros said quietly.

"Yes, children might have been our saving. But after Robert was born, her gynaecologist advised her not to risk another baby."

"I see. And now?" Ros asked diffidently.

"She is married to the Italian chauffeur who supplanted me," Richard said, with a shrug. "He owns a small garage now, and they live alongside it in a bungalow full of chipboard furniture and wrought-iron knick-knacks. They appeared to be admirably suited."

"You've been there?"

"Yes, for Rob's sake we're all very amicable."

"Was it you who financed the garage?"

He nodded. "Even though Valerie was never at home in the setting I provided for her, there were comforts she would have missed as the wife of a chauffeur. I felt she was entitled to a half share of the wreckage."

"Does Rob stay with them sometimes?"

"Only for a day or two at a time. He's as out of his element with them as his mother was out of hers with me."

"She must miss him terribly."

"No, oddly enough, I don't think so. In the same way that female cats devote themselves to their litters until the kittens are old enough to fend for themselves, I think

Val has only a detached interest in Rob now. Her early affection for him began to die down when he first went away to school. Her emotions are too shallow to survive prolonged separations."

"What about Rob? Do you think he would welcome a stepmother, and perhaps some stepbrothers and sisters?"

"I believe he would welcome *you* as a stepmother, and surely he is past the age to resent the arrival of younger children? Frankly, I would hope to have several, but how do you feel about a family?"

"I've never given it much thought. I suppose I've always been too busy with the present to think very much about the future."

"Very different from my ex-wife," said Richard, rather sourly. "She was planning layettes from the day we returned from our honeymoon. Once she knew she was pregnant, she and her mother talked about babies incessantly. I like children, but I don't wish to discuss them to the exclusion of every other topic."

Knowing the facts of Richard's first marriage was not as helpful as Ros had hoped. Far from clearing her mind, it seemed to cloud it with fresh doubts. In particular, his lingering bitterness worried her. She felt that bitterness, like jealousy, was a corrosive emotion leaving ineradicable scars which even subsequent happiness could never completely obliterate.

Also, although second and even third marriages were commonplace among the kind of people for whom she worked, it had never occurred to her that she might become someone's second wife. Irrational as it might be, she could not like the idea. Always she had visualised marriage as a new way of life for her husband as well as for her; a partnership unencumbered by previous mistakes and bad memories.

Above all, it worried her very much that, in spite of Richard's assurance to her, if she refused his proposal it might become very difficult to continue in her present position. Had she only herself to consider, that aspect need not have influenced her. But her responsibility for Christopher put her in the difficult position of a widow or an unmarried mother.

In the days that followed, the need to make a decision hung over her like a shadow, distracting her even when she was working so that, for the first time in her professional life, she began to make careless mistakes such as neglecting to remove things from the freezer in time for them to defrost properly, or forgetting to seed the grapes until minutes before a fruit salad was due on the table.

Her mind wandered at other times, too.

"I don't think you're listening to me," Richard said to her one evening.

They were sitting on deck, watching the sunset. Esteban and Dolores were on board, but the others had gone ashore; the boys to a teenagers' party in one of the villas, and Jaime and Ramon to Mahon, for what purpose they had not mentioned except to say they would not be back until late.

"I'm sorry. I was wool-gathering," Ros admitted, when Richard taxed her with her inattention.

"No need to apologise. It was my fault for boring you with such a dull subject," he said dryly.

"Oh, Richard, I wasn't bored!" she protested truthfully. "Inflation is a subject which must interest everyone nowadays. We are all affected by it. It was just . . . just that something you said made my mind go off at a tangent."

When he lifted an enquiring eyebrow, she added, less

truthfully, "Talk about inflation always turns my mind towards starvation, and then I started thinking about Western eating habits which led me to Protoveg."

"What the devil is Protoveg?"

"It's a vegetable product which simulates meat and bacon. Cooked with some water, a five-ounce packet of Protoveg becomes a pound of pork or beef substitute."

"It sounds useful for emergency rations, but I hope we are never reduced to eating it in normal circumstances."

"I don't suppose you will be," said Ros, with an inward smile.

She had no intention of revealing that on several occasions, in ragouts and sauces, he had eaten Protoveg without detecting a difference. She had also served him with a non-caloric, cellulose-based cream, partly because, although yoghourt was obtainable locally, dairy cream was not always easy to come by, and partly because the dietetic side of her training made her very much aware of the danger to men such as Richard of foods with a high cholesterol content.

In fact it had not been Protoveg which had been preoccupying her when Richard had noticed the absent expression on her face. She had been gazing out to sea, but in her mind's eye there had been a vision of a sixteen-year-old boy lying awake in his berth on the night train from Paris to Port Bou because, in a Barcelona hospital, his mother was on the critical list.

For the rest of the evening she forced herself to concentrate on Richard's conversation. It was not until she was in bed, and her thoughts were at last free to wander, that the image of the young Jaime returned to her.

Probably at sixteen he would have been as tall as he was now, but not as broad across the shoulders, and less controlled in his movements. How lonely he must have felt;

one parent dead, the other dying, leaving him a stranger in his birthplace and an alien in his father's homeland. Ros, who knew something of loneliness, felt her heart ache for the boy travelling south on borrowed money. It was probably the memory of that journey which had made Jaime uncharacteristically reserved when he and she had shared a compartment on the same train. It had been in the morning, she remembered, that he had begun to be friendly with her, and had ended by kissing her goodbye.

An involuntary smile curved her lips as she thought of their parting at Barcelona, and their meeting a few days later at Vinaroz. It seemed a long time ago, far more than the space of a summer.

The following evening the others remained on board, and she and Richard went to a drinks party in a walled garden in the French-founded town of San Luis.

The setting was delightful, but the conversation was the superficial chit-chat usual at any large party where most of the guests are acquaintances rather than friends. And the food consisted of what, privately, Ros called party pills, meaning a large variety of over-decorated and somewhat soggy mouthfuls which could neither be bitten nor chewed, and had to be gulped down like tablets, leaving a taste of packet aspic.

On the way home, Richard said, "By the way, while I was in England I met a man who was at school with James. He told me the most extraordinary tale about him."

"Really? What was it?"

"I knew James had Spanish blood in him, but I didn't know how he came by it," said Richard. "It appears that his father was up at Cambridge when, like a lot of other young hotheads, he came here to fight against Franco in the Spanish civil war. As if that were not mad enough,

he then got a peasant girl into trouble and felt obliged to marry her. Had he survived the war, I daresay his family would have been able to extricate him from the marriage, but as he was killed and they had no other sons, they hadn't much choice but to make the best of the situation. As soon as the war in Europe was over, they traced the girl, offered her a generous settlement, and took James back to England where, later, he rewarded their generosity by running away from his public school and causing his grandfather to have a fatal heart attack. I must say I wouldn't have thought it of him."

"What makes you believe it?" asked Ros.

"The man who told me seemed a reliable type, not given to exaggeration. Do you disbelieve it?"

"I knew it already," she said. "But I heard it from someone on the Spanish side of his family, and she told it rather differently." She recounted the story of Jaime's boyhood as she had heard it from Angelita.

"Mm, that does throw a somewhat different light on the matter," Richard agreed, when she had finished. "But I still think he was a fool to throw away his English inheritance. If he had played his cards right, he could have been a rich man now."

She stared at him. "You don't really mean that, do you, Richard?"

"Certainly I do." He saw that he had shocked her. "I'm a realist, my dear. You are a sentimentalist. Like most women, you can't resist the idea of The World Well Lost For Love, even though your common sense should tell you that relationships based on that concept are very seldom successful in the long term. In this particular case, the durability of the marriage was never tested. The young man was killed – cut down in the flower of his youth, as they say, which again touches your sentimental streak and

warps your judgment. Had he stuck to his studies at university, instead of rushing off to interfere in a war which was none of his business, he would not have been killed and his parents would have been spared much mental agony. Consider what he made them suffer before you condemn them."

"If he hadn't been killed in the Spanish war, he would probably have died in the World War. I really don't see how the sufferings he caused his parents can excuse his mother's unfeeling treatment of Jaime . . . of James. Had he been taken from his mother as an infant, he would have felt no strong link with her. But he was eight when they took him. He spoke only Spanish. He *was* Spanish. It was like – like uprooting a sapling in the middle of the growing season."

"People are hardier than plants," Richard replied. "From what I've heard of Spain at that period, he would have been lucky to have enough to eat. In England, he had every advantage!"

"Except love," she said, in a low tone. " 'Better a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith'."

"Well, let's not argue about it," said Richard, a shade impatiently. "I think James was a fool. You disagree. It's not a matter of great moment."

"But it is – it's very important. It represents two sets of values – conflicting values," she persisted. "If we look at life so differently, how can we hope to live in harmony?"

They had come to the car park behind the road to the beach, and he did not reply until he had parked and switched off. He turned to face her. "My dear girl, it isn't necessary to see eye to eye on every issue."

"No, but surely on matters of principle –" She stop-

ped, and gave a slow sigh. Perhaps it was merely the aftermath of a rather boring party, but she felt tired and oddly depressed.

He chose that moment to kiss her, and it was so out of keeping with her mood that she could not help turning her face away. Briefly, his lips touched her cheek. Then he drew back.

"I – I'm sorry, Richard. The fact is I have rather a headache. I think there was too much gin in the *sangria* I had at the party. Gin always makes my head ache."

"You should have told me. I would have brought you back earlier."

They got out of the car, and he locked it and they crossed the tarred road and followed a sandy path through the low brush behind the beach to the bare rocks of the headland.

If Richard was annoyed at being rebuffed – and she felt he must suspect that her headache was an invention – he did not neglect to put a steadying hand on her arm when they came to the rocks where, in shoes with high heels, there was a chance she might trip.

It was not necessary for him to whistle for the tender. Jaime had seen them coming and was already rowing towards them when they reached the place where a flat rock down by the surface of the sea formed a natural landing stage.

"Good party?" he asked, when Richard had helped Ros into the boat.

"Not particularly. Rostangue made the mistake of accepting our host's special *sangria.* It's made her head ache. I played safe and stuck to brandy."

"*Sangria* can be excellent, or it can be a real witches' brew," said Jaime.

On board *Seabird,* Ros said, "If you don't mind, I

think I'll go straight to bed. Goodnight."

In bed, she lay thinking about Richard's attempted embrace and her involuntary recoil. She could not help feeling it had been extraordinarily ill-judged to try to kiss her when they were close to an argument, and even more inept, having made the attempt, tamely to accept being repulsed.

It was one thing for Jaime, in the days when he had flirted with her, to let her repulse him without difficulty. But Richard wanted her to marry him. If putting his arms round her had so little effect on him that merely by averting her face she could make him desist, either he must be uncommonly cool-blooded or he knew nothing about women.

Jaime, in the same situation (although he would never have tried to kiss her just then) somehow would have made her respond to him. There were moments when girls did not want to be treated considerately; and if Richard, at his age, had not learned when to be gentle and when to be a little rough, it seemed unlikely he would ever learn.

A thought drifted up from the depths of her subconscious mind, like a fish rising to the surface of a pool.

How simple everything would be if Richard were Jaime, and Jaime were Richard. There would be no problem.

Why would there be no problem?

Because if Richard were Jaime, I would love him.

The truth was as startling as a landslide. In a second everything was changed, yet what was laid bare was not new. It had been there, hidden, all the time.

Why didn't I realise it weeks ago? she thought dazedly.

The only explanation seemed to be that loving Jaime had not happened in the way love was supposed to come about. Indeed in its early stages her relationship with

Richard had seemed closer to the conventional idea of falling in love. He had made a powerful and disturbing first impression on her, and for a long time she had been nervous of him and unsure of herself in his presence. With Jaime she had always felt at ease, and ease had seemed too comfortable a state to be a preliminary to love.

Now she saw that although at first Richard's rather inscrutable manner had misled her into thinking him a man of deep and complex character, in fact he was not a particularly profound person. Jaime was a far more subtle and stimulating personality but he, too, she had taken at face value, mistaking his lightness of manner for lightness of mind.

She remembered a line from a poem by Lord Byron. 'Friendship is Love without his wings'.

When had her feelings taken wing, and why was it not until tonight that she had recognised the hopelessly earth-bound nature of a marriage to Richard compared with the soaring bliss of belonging to Jaime? *If* he wanted her. *If* he loved her.

When she remembered that only a short time ago she had actually asked his advice about marrying Richard, she felt that any warm feelings he might have had for her must have been quenched by that conversation. And yet the last thing he had said had been – 'Any man who had you to share his bed and board couldn't fail to be happy'.

Anyway, the first thing she must do was to speak to Richard. Not now, when it was nearly midnight, and he might be and probably was in bed. But first thing in the morning.

On the mainland, it was his custom, she had discovered, to rise at first light and, wearing a thin cotton track suit, to jog round the roads of Laguna Blau by a route which

enabled him to combine an hour's exercise with a thorough tour of inspection. He would then return to *Seabird* for a shower and a glass of yoghourt to keep him going until, after a spell at his desk, he joined the others for breakfast.

In Menorca he jogged along the coast road, and it seemed to Ros that the best time to tell him she could not marry him was if she could catch him as he went ashore for his exercise. There would be no risk of their being interrupted by the boys. Besides, now that her mind was clear at last, she was impatient to announce her decision to Jaime, which she could not do until she had spoken to Richard.

Therefore she set her alarm clock to wake her very early and, when Richard came on deck, he found her waiting by the gangway.

"What are you doing up at this hour?" he asked, in surprise.

"I want to talk to you privately, and there may not be a chance later on. Do you mind walking instead of jogging this morning?"

As they climbed into the dinghy, he said, "Oddly enough I wanted to talk to you last night, but in the end I decided not to disturb you. It was after midnight, and I thought you would be asleep."

"No, I wasn't. What was it about?"

"Something rather disconcerting has happened," said Richard, with a frown. "James has decided to leave me."

"Leave you?" She drew in her breath. "Why? For what possible reason?"

"He says he's restless . . . bored with the Mediterranean. As it happens, his contract with me expires in a couple of months' time, and he's asked me to release him as soon as I can find a replacement. In view of what I

was told about him in England recently, it's not as surprising as it would have been a few weeks ago. Obviously there's a streak of instability in him. No doubt a psychologist would put it down to his disrupted childhood. Perhaps it's a hereditary weakness. I wouldn't know. All I know is that it's damned inconvenient for me."

CHAPTER SIX

"Yes," she said dully. "Yes, it must be a great blow."

They reached the rocks, and she scrambled ashore, sure-footed this morning in her deck shoes.

"What was it you wanted to say to me?" asked Richard, when he had made fast to a mooring ring driven into a crevice by someone else who had used the place as a landing stage.

Ros did not know how to answer. In the light of this turn of events, it no longer seemed the right moment to announce her decision.

He said, "You're not going to marry me – is that it?"

"Yes," she admitted reluctantly.

"I think I knew it last night when we came back from the party. Or perhaps I knew it from the outset," he said heavily. "From your point of view there is something lacking between us. If you were several years older you would see it differently. If you were thirty . . ."

"I'm sorry, Richard," she said gently. "I shall always be . . . honoured that you asked me."

"Don't look so anxious, my dear. It will make no difference to our present arrangements. I promised you that, and I meant it."

"Are you sure it will make no difference?" she asked doubtfully.

"None at all," said Richard firmly. "Now I may as well take my usual exercise." He patted her shoulder, and turned away.

Ros remained where she was until he reached the road

and began jogging along it, as if nothing unusual had happened and it was any ordinary morning.

By the time she had rowed back to *Seabird*, the shock and dismay she had felt on first hearing about Jaime was beginning to wear off. She was torn between hope and uncertainty; hope that Jaime's reason for leaving must be his belief that she could not resist Richard's offer, and uncertainty that it was so. Perhaps he *was* bored with the Mediterranean. Yet now that she recognized the true nature of her feelings towards him, she could see no reason for the ending of his flirtation with her except that he had begun to care for her in earnest.

At breakfast, neither Jaime nor Richard gave any hint that before long *Seabird* would have a different skipper.

Momentarily catching Jaime's eye across the table, Ros felt a tremor go through her. It amazed her that she could ever have resisted him when, now, merely to watch him eating his kedgeree made her ache with love for him.

Richard had been invited to attend a reception for the Minister of Tourism who was paying a visit to the island. He set out for this engagement at mid-morning. The boys were already snorkelling. Jaime had not been seen since breakfast.

Ros took two books she had borrowed from his shelves and went to his cabin.

He must have thought it was Dolores knocking on the door, for he called out, "*Adelante.*"

When she entered, he was writing a letter at the fitment which doubled as a dressing table and desk. He glanced up, saw who it was and, obviously surprised, pushed back his chair and stood up.

"I'm sorry to disturb you. I was bringing these back," she said, glancing at the books she was holding. "Would you mind if I chose something else?"

"Go ahead. You won't mind if I get on with this?"

"Of course not."

He sat down and resumed his letter. Quietly, Ros closed the door, watching his profile to see if he gave any sign of noticing her action. A muscle stirred in his cheek, but it did not necessarily signify that he had registered the closing of the door and knew the books were only a pretext for her presence in his cabin.

As she replaced them in the spaces where they belonged, her mouth and throat were dry with nervousness. "Richard says you're leaving *Seabird*?"

"Yes."

She glanced at him. He had completed the sentence which her arrival had interrupted, and now he was frowning at his writing pad and twirling his pen between his forefinger and thumb.

"I think I may also have to leave now that I've turned down Richard's offer of marriage."

Jaime looked at her then, and it seemed he was going to speak. Instead he compressed his lips and returned his gaze to his letter.

After a pause Ros swallowed and forced herself to say, "Aren't you interested in why I refused him?"

This time a hard knot of muscle appeared at the angle of his jaw. She knew his teeth must be clenched hard.

But his voice, when he answered, was casual. "I suppose you came to the conclusion that you and he are not really very compatible."

"No, that wasn't the reason." She paused. "I realised I was in love with someone else."

He did not pretend not to understand what she meant. Still without looking at her, he said, "I can't deny that we're attracted to each other, or that when you first came here I made a few mild passes at you. But that was some time ago, Ros, and lately I've tried to keep our relationship on a friendly basis."

"I know you have; but I don't know *why* you have, Jaime."

Again he shoved back his chair, and rose, and turned to the porthole. Looking out at the sea, with his back to her, he said, "Because I'm much older than you are, with more experience of life, and I know that what you call being *in* love is actually no more than a powerful urge to *make* love. Old Mother Nature at work to perpetuate the species."

Ros stared at his broad, straight shoulders. "I don't think it is only that. I'm not a young girl in my teens, full of starry-eyed notions. If I'm old enough and wise enough to see that Richard is not the right man for me – in spite of all he has to offer – why should a mere attraction cloud my judgment?"

'There's nothing 'mere' about sex. It's as powerful a force as a flood tide," Jaime said dryly. "I have to be cruel to be kind, Ros. The truth is that what you feel now is not a lifetime emotion. It's something which, if we slept together, would probably wear off in weeks."

Although he was not looking at her, a flush tinged her golden-brown face. She said, with the boldness of desperation, "All right: let's try it and see."

At that he whirled round. She had never seen him furious before. He was a man whose most characteristic expression was a look of relaxed good humour with, more often than not, a twinkle lurking in his eyes. But now, all at once, he was angry, and his eyes and his mouth were so grim that she felt almost frightened of him.

He said roughly, "I don't think you mean that, but if you do, it proves my point. You don't know me well enough to love me. I don't want an affair of that sort with you. I want –"

As he stopped short, Ros held her breath. For a ter-

rible moment she thought he was not going to continue, and she was never going to know the true state of his feelings towards her.

But then, in a flat voice, he went on, "What I'd like is to provide a home for you, and have children with you, and give you everything you want. But that isn't possible now. It's too late for us – ten years too late."

Happiness gushed up inside her. "If you love me nothing is impossible," she explained exultantly. "Jaime, don't look so worried. It isn't like you. What is there to be worried about?"

"Listen to me, Ros – listen to me." As she moved towards him, he took her by the shoulders and held her at arm's length from him. "I am thirty-five, and I have neither savings nor prospects. You are twenty-three and until Christopher became your dependant you had a choice of interesting posts and an excellent salary to spend as you pleased. I can't provide the stable home which is what the boy needs for several years, and I can't keep you in the style to which you're accustomed."

"But that's absurd," she protested. "How many men can give their wives as much pin money as they had when they were single girls? As for Christopher, what could possibly be better for him than to have you as his exemplar for a year or two?"

"Oh, yes, I'm a splendid example to a boy." His voice was sharp with sarcasm. "Come down to earth, Ros."

She saw that it was not going to be easy to overcome his objections, but at least she had his tacit admission that her feelings were reciprocated.

She said, "Do you remember the night we talked about the Code of Love? It says in the Code – No one should be deprived of his love without exceeding good reason. I don't think lack of money is a good reason. If you were

already married, or had a criminal record, or if you drank or were a gambler, those would be exceeding good reasons. But as for being twelve years older, people with much greater age gaps have –"

"I'm out of a job," he cut in. "Or I shall be before too much longer."

"Then why not stay in your present one? Or am I wrong in assuming that you decided to leave because you thought I was going to accept Richard's offer?"

He dropped his hands and thrust them deep in his pockets. Although she knew he had not meant to hurt her, his grasp had been painfully strong and tomorrow there would be bruises on her shoulders.

Leaving her question unanswered, he said, "Richard's desire to marry you may be more practical than passionate, but I can't see him taking kindly to your closer relationship with me. It would be an impossible situation. Anyway the reason I gave him for leaving was not a lie. I've had enough of this set-up. I'm beginning to want a change of scene and work which is more demanding than this sinecure on *Seabird*."

"And 'He travels fastest who travels alone'. Is that your motto, Jaime?"

He said fiercely, "You know damn well it isn't. I've been travelling alone most of my life, but not from choice. If I could take you with me, I would, and the boy as well. But he has to be educated, and I haven't the money to pay his school fees for a term, let alone for three or four years. I wasn't exaggerating when I told you I had no savings. I haven't checked my balance recently, but I doubt if there's more than twenty thousand pesetas in my account at the Bilbao."

"Dear me, you must be a spendthrift. What *do* you find to squander it on, I wonder?" she murmured, with

gentle irony.

For the first time since she had known him, he avoided her enquiring gaze. "I don't know, but it goes," he said evasively.

"Yes, and your cousin Angelita mentioned some of the places it goes to, so it's futile to try to convince me that you're naturally thriftless. Improvident for yourself, perhaps. But not altogether improvident."

"Angelita talks a great deal of nonsense. You shouldn't believe all –" He broke off to open the door to whoever was knocking.

It was Esteban. He spoke too swiftly for Ros to understand his message, but it caused Jaime to turn to her and say, "I'm afraid you'll have to excuse me."

When he had gone, she sat down on the edge of his bed and tried to think of a way to overcome his obduracy. She could not deny the force of his arguments, but nor could she believe that, loving each other, they could not find some solution to their financial problems. If there were only the two of them, the situation would be different. It was Christopher's schooling which was the stumbling block. To keep him at boarding school until he was eighteen would cost at least four thousand pounds, and possibly more. She could earn the money, but not if her choice of jobs was restricted by having a husband.

We could wait, I suppose, she thought gloomily. But oh, what a waste of four years!

Richard was out for lunch and, while the boys were discussing inflatable boats, Ros said suddenly, "Jaime, have you ever read a book called *The Longest Night?*"

"Not that I recall. What's it about?"

"It's an historical novel about France in the sixteenth century, and how the Catholics massacred the Huguenots

on the Eve of St. Bartholomew. My grandfather gave me a copy for my fifteenth birthday, and it made a great impression on me, especially one passage in it."

She paused, remembering how, on the night of her birthday, she had read till two in the morning, carried away by the power and vividness of the novel.

"There was a love story in it. The man was a Catholic and he saved a Huguenot girl from being murdered. But as a result he lost his high position in the world. He wanted to marry her, but he no longer had anything to offer her. Her brother-in-law thought she ought to marry another man with plenty of money. But her father, who was very wise – and this is the bit I've never forgotten – her father said, 'In these days, all our houses stand upon sand. There is only one absolutely essential quality which a woman must look for in a husband today; that he shall be a *man*'."

Their eyes met across the table, and in his there blazed, for an instant, a light which made her hand shake as she picked up her wine glass.

Then he took an orange from the fruit bowl and began to peel it, Spanish fashion, his tanned face a mask without expression.

"I think that is as true today as it was then," she went on quietly and, looking at him, she was more than ever amazed that she had not realised much sooner the difference between him and Richard.

Richard, because of his wealth, could command all the comforts of life. But the man himself did not generate a feeling of security. If the yacht, out at sea, were to founder, it would not be Richard to whom she would turn for her safety. If she were struck down by an illness, Richard could procure the finest treatment, but he could not, by his presence, give her courage. Jaime could.

The boys were not listening to their elders. Jaime said in a low tone, "Don't look at me like that, Ros."

"Why not?"

He did not answer but finished his fruit and left the table. "I'm going ashore for an hour or two."

When Richard returned from Mahon, the boys had gone up the coast in the powerboat with Ramon. Ros was on deck, repairing the hem of a skirt where the stitching had come adrift.

Richard rang for Esteban and asked for a jug of iced lime. He told Ros about the reception, and the private luncheon party afterwards.

Presently she said, "Richard, the situation has altered since we talked early this morning. I've discovered that James has become . . . fond of me. It's the principal reason he asked you to replace him. He thought I was going to marry you, and he didn't want to stay in those circumstances."

"I see. How did this come to light?" he asked her, looking annoyed.

"I – I suspected that it wasn't only restlessness, so I told him we weren't getting married."

"Whereupon he had the effrontery to propose to you himself," said Richard furiously.

"Not at all. He said he had nothing to offer me."

His choler subsided a little. "That being so, I'm surprised he should find it necessary to unburden himself," he commented acidly.

"I encouraged him. You could even say I pressed him. I felt it would be wrong for him to leave you on account of a misapprehension about our future relationship. As things are, the most sensible solution is for me to be the one to go away."

It had not crossed his mind that a declaration from

Jaime could be welcome to her, she noticed.

He thought for some moments before he said, "Perhaps you are right, but it may be that there is a compromise. Someone said something to me today which has given me an idea. But I want to think it over at leisure. We'll discuss this again later on."

The presence of the two boys saved the conversation at dinner that night from being uncomfortably constrained. An outsider might not have suspected there was any tension between the three adults at the table.

Afterwards, Jaime would have excused himself from taking coffee on deck, as was their custom, but Richard prevented him from leaving. "No doubt you can spare twenty minutes. I want to talk to you both."

While Esteban was serving the coffee, Jaime looked at Ros and raised an eyebrow. She responded with the slightest of shrugs.

The boys had disappeared below, and when the steward had withdrawn, Richard said, "It seems you were not entirely open with me when you told me you wished to leave my service, James. There was no reason why you should confide private and personal matters to me, and I think you would have been well advised to keep your own counsel where Rostangue was concerned, as well. However –"

"Richard, that isn't fair," Ros intervened. "I *made* him tell me." She turned to Jaime, her cheeks hot. "I had to explain things to Richard. It wouldn't be right for you to leave him on my account. I am the . . . the fly in the ointment, not you. I must be the one to go." She turned back to Richard. "I really don't see why you had to bring this up in public."

"Why not? – since it involves us all."

"What did you tell Richard, Ros?" Jaime enquired.

His hazel eyes were enigmatic.

Was he inwardly raging? she wondered, with a sinking feeling.

"Not very much. Just that you" – she swallowed – "that you loved me, but saw no future in it."

Jaime looked at Richard. "That was one of my grounds for not wishing to renew our contract. But the reason I gave you was not a lie. I haven't changed my mind, nor shall I do so – and not because Ros needs her place here more than I need mine. Chivalrous gestures are not my style. I'd been thinking of making a move for some time before Ros arrived."

"Well, if that's so, there's nothing I can do to dissuade you," answered Richard. "But as far as Rostangue is concerned, I believe there is a middle course which would relieve me . . . relieve us of concern for her future welfare, and also relieve her of the understandable embarrassment of her present position."

"What have you in mind?" Jaime asked.

"A woman at the reception this morning was describing to me the problems of entertaining in an alien environment. She said that here there are none of the patés and gâteaux and so on which simplify dinner parties in England and France. It occurs to me that Rostangue might be able to provide a useful and profitable service to residents and renters at Laguna Blau by cooking such things to order. At any rate I am prepared to provide the necessary premises and equipment, and a certain amount of launching capital. What do you say to my scheme, Rostangue?"

"I don't know," she answered uncertainly. "It could be a runaway success, or it could be a disaster. There are patés and cakes to be had here, but they are very different from ours, and I don't think anyone could say that

a Spanish *pasteleria* compares with a French *pâtisserie*."

"Would you be prepared to have a crack at it?"

"What do you think, Jaime?" she asked.

"If Richard is ready to finance the scheme, what have you got to lose?"

"I don't know, Richard," she said. "I would have to think about it very carefully."

It really depends on Jaime, was what she thought inwardly, and whether I can make him change his mind. There must be a way for us to be together. Surely there must be a way?

Next day they returned to the mainland for the final fortnight of the boys' holidays. Since Richard made frequent references to his plan for her future, it was inevitable that eventually Christopher would become aware of the project.

"Doesn't Mr. Livingstone want you on *Seabird* any more? Why is he always discussing this food shop idea?" he asked his aunt one afternoon, having come to her cabin to see if she could replace a broken lace in one of his deck shoes.

Ros judged it best to be honest with him. "Can you keep something under your hat, Christopher?"

"Of course."

"Mr. Livingstone has asked me to marry him, but although I like him very much, I don't want to be his wife. That puts us both in a slightly uncomfortable situation, and the shop would be a way out of it."

"Oh, I see. And are you going to do it?"

"I don't know," she said, with a sigh. "I only wish I did."

"It's a pity it wasn't James who wanted to marry you."

"Why do you say that?"

"I like him better than Mr. Livingstone. Don't you?"

"Yes, I do – I like him much better."

"I think he's pretty keen on you. He's always staring at you. When you aren't staring at him, he's staring at you."

"Really?" Ros gave the ghost of a laugh.

"I could give him a hint if you like," Christopher offered. "I mean a hint that you like him. Perhaps he doesn't know it."

"Oh, yes, he does. I told him," she said, with a wry face. She saw a hint of anxiety lurking in her nephew's eyes. "Don't worry, Christopher, love. Whatever happens . . . whatever other jobs I take, you will always be able to spend the holidays with me. That is until you're much older and want to be more independent."

Later, when he had gone, she sat on her dressing stool and thought how absurd it was that, when even a schoolboy had noticed that she and Jaime were forever gazing at each other, their feelings had remained unspoken since the morning she had gone to his cabin.

Not by one word or touch had Jaime affirmed the things he had told her in his cabin, and Ros felt that already she had said more than was decorous. She had positively flung herself at him. The next move – if there should be one – had to come from him.

As the holidays drew to a close, Richard began to press her to make up her mind about the catering shop. By now he was enthusiastic, and convinced she could make a success of the venture. Ros thought so too, but did not say so, hoping against hope that Jaime would show some sign of weakening towards her. But his manner remained inexorably impersonal.

Once, lying awake at night, she remembered her reckless challenge that day in his cabin, and thought that a more liberated girl would break down his resistance by

wafting along to his cabin in something filmy and deliberately testing the self-discipline which Gigi had read in the firmness of his upper lip. But, in that sense at least, she was not liberated, and she had an intuitive feeling that Jaime liked her the better for it.

Night after night of racking her brains for a solution often made her feel listless by day. One afternoon, after a particularly bad night, she felt so tired and depressed that she went to her cabin to rest.

She was roused by someone gently shaking her, and opened her eyes to find Jaime sitting on the bed. For a moment she thought she was dreaming, and then as she lay blinking at him, he bent down and kissed her mouth.

She did not wonder what had brought him. She knew only that he was there, and nothing else mattered.

A long time later, he said huskily, "Do you remember the day I took you to my *finca*?"

His face was half buried in the curve between her neck and her shoulder. Softly, she kissed the ear which was nearest her lips. "Yes, I remember it. Why?"

"For some time, I've been refusing some excellent offers for it. With some of the *fincas* nearby, it would make an excellent site for an *urbanizacion*. The other owners were willing but; at that time, I wasn't. Now I've sold it for so much more than I paid for it that we have enough money to cover all Christopher's school fees, and also to fly him to wherever we happen to be in the next year or two." While he talked, he had raised himself on to one elbow to look at her.

"Oh, Jaime, you sold it for me? But it was your retreat . . . your nest egg!"

"Now I have a better investment." He kissed her, but quietly this time, not with the rough, desperate hunger of his earlier kisses. "I didn't tell you before because I was

waiting for a reply to a cable." He swung himself into a sitting position and reached for two pieces of paper which he must have put on the locker before he woke her.

"That's my cable. That's the reply. I think they're more or less self-explanatory."

Ros sat up and shook back her hair.

Jaime's cable was addressed to Sullivan, Mango Island, West Indies, and read – IS YOUR OFFER STILL OPEN STOP HOPE SOON TO HAVE BEAUTIFUL CORDON BLEU WIFE AT PRESENT COOKING FOR TYCOON STOP NEED WORK FOR ME STOP ROOF FOR HER STOP REGARDS TO CHARLOTTE STOP JAIME HATFIELD.

The reply to this message was – ALWAYS WARM WELCOME FOR BEAUTIFUL GIRL WHO CAN COOK STOP VERY GLAD TO HEAR FROM YOU AGAIN STOP JUST THE MAN FOR NEW SCHEME STOP DETAILS FOLLOWING BY LETTER STOP. CHARLOTTE SENDS LOVE STOP. The signature was LIAM.

"Who are these people?" Ros asked.

"Liam is a chap I met years ago when we were both knocking about the world in a footloose, aimless sort of way. The last time I saw him, he'd changed and become a very prosperous hotelier with a charming wife, Charlotte. He told me if I ever wanted a shore job, he could always find something for me. Evidently he meant it."

"So we're going to live in the West Indies? How exciting! I've always wanted to visit that part of the world."

"It's not always quite as idyllic as the tourist brochures make out. It can be hellishly humid, and now and then there are hurricanes. But it's somewhere to start, and we don't have to stay there for ever."

"I can hardly believe it," she murmured. "I've been so

worried . . . so miserable. Why didn't you tell me you had these irons in the fire, Jaime?"

"I was afraid of raising your hopes only to dash them," he said. "It was possible that the company who have bought the *finca* would no longer be interested. It was also possible that the Sullivans would have forgotten me. Also, I suppose, I'm not used to sharing my problems. I tend to put up the barricades. It's a hangover from my childhood when I had no one to confide in."

"Yes, I understand," Ros said gently. "Angelita told me about that, too. But now you have me, and I have you, and if we have troubles we can share them."

He took the cables from her and tossed them aside. They fluttered slowly to the floor while he folded her in his arms, and said in his first language, "But I think mainly we shall have happiness."

The story of Charlotte and Liam Sullivan is told in *Sullivan's Reef* by Anne Weale